

On a card, write down what are some of your life goals, dreams, things you want to happen or accomplish in your lifetime. Perhaps it is to get married, have children, travel the world, get educational degrees or career goals. What is important to you?

Vision and Trajectory - Importance of Desires and Goals

You are all young. A lifetime is ahead of you, Lord willing. At the end of your life, your life will amount to a pile of choices you've made. Think of all these choices that you will make in the next 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years...it is hard to imagine so far into the future. Know that your DAILY CHOICES will pile up and build PATTERNS in your life and establish the PATH you choose to live. These words are so important to consider when you are young (or old!): CHOICES. DESIRE. VISION. Why so important? Because they will determine how your life will end. Will you finish well and be received warmly by Jesus or barely enter into the Kingdom of God by the skin of your teeth? Will you have spent your life well? You need to ask, what is your end goal? Know that there are pitfalls and we need to set the direction of our lives with a trajectory that is stable, sure and solidly on Christ.

Now, these choices will be based on your desires and your beliefs. So what you believe and desire will be essential to look at so you choose well and reach your end goals. Oh Jesus, give us Your wisdom to choose well.

Matthew 6:22-23

"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

How you see, what you choose to see and believe, will impact whether you live in light or live in darkness.

Arrows / Choices illustration

(Draw arrow from the left side of the board, going upward to the right side. At the end of the arrow, draw a symbol for God, showing that life is pointing toward being with God, face to face. Then along that arrow, draw that same symbol along that arrow, many times, to show that you are progressively seeing God and getting to know Him. Now draw a new arrow that starts at the same point, but the trajectory is off and starts by pointing slightly downward, explain that if you make poor decisions and shift your trajectory off God's will, if you take it on further, it will lead you downward and far from your final goal, pointing downward with lots of heartache. But since we will all make choices both good and bad, when you realize you have made a bad one, you can repent and turn back on that path—draw a loop from the starting point and then back to that point. We want to make good choices with our mind set on the Lord so that we maximize our time and grow to the greatest degree possible.)

Be a person who doesn't have to live the hard way. Learn quickly, trust with abandon, follow His voice without reservation. Know your end goal and set your trajectory to get there.

Questions -

What do you desire to be your end goals in life?

What choices will help you get there?

Set your face like flint toward Him until you see Him face to face. Let's look to Jesus' example. He was rejected by the townspeople before He went to the Cross and He did was resilient in His resolve. He did not let the rejection effect his determination toward His goal.

Luke 9:51

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Then we see His eternal vision in the face of suffering.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

So when you face crossroads in your life, what will you choose? Will you seek and press in to where your view of God can encompass your pain and carry you through it?

Pitfalls in life - Have No Line / Limit to Following Jesus

On this path, there are pitfalls:

disappointments—what if the job you wanted and worked hard for is given to someone else?

suffering—what if you give birth to a child and at age one, he has a seizure and suddenly dies?

pain—what if you develop an aggressive form of cancer as a teenager and are given only 1 year to live?

loss—what if you have a sports accident and have an injury, leaving you a paraplegic, wheelchair bound for the rest of your life?

betrayal—what if one day you find out your husband has been having an affair with another woman and might have given you AIDS?

hurt—what if the person you care most about, in a conflict, points out all of your failures and faults, crushing you?

injustice—what if you suffered great loss because someone murdered your relative and he comes to faith in Jesus and is forgiven for all his sins?

abuse—what if you find out that your husband has been committing horrible crimes against your children?

death—what if your fiancée dies before your wedding day? or what if you are 5 months pregnant and you go into preterm labor and your baby dies in your hands?

These are all REAL examples of from my own life or people I know. My question for you is, do you have a line? Is there a point where things could get so bad that you will decide to throw in the spiritual towel, where you decide that God can't be good and you decide to stop trusting Him in the midst of your pain and brokenness?

When our second child died prematurely in 2002, it challenged my view of God as I struggled to survive in the very deep waters of grief. My current view of God as inadequate to support me in the great pain and loss I was experiencing. I had to press in and seek and wait. I had to guard my heart from believing lies. One lie I was tempted with was that because God is sovereign to let her die, He could not be good because I was in so much pain. Next week I will share about how God met me and transformed my pain and brought healing and understanding. But many will choose in the face of pain, to turn from God in anger because their idol was comfort ease and their view of God had a limit and when life crossed that limit, it became a crisis point and they chose to walk away. Don't do this. Press in. He will be bigger than your pain.

Life has dark valleys ahead of you. So when, not if, you walk through them, echo the psalmist's words of faith.

Psalm 23:4

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

What will you choose: to trust God and find Him as your Help, Refuge and Friend, or turn from Him and accuse Him of wrongdoing and live in anger against God, as you face pain and disappointments? The enemy has laid these landmines in your path to try to turn you. He wants you to turn from God. He wants to steal worship and trust from God. But we know his schemes and are not unaware. We can choose now, by the power of His Spirit,

to follow Jesus no matter what. When the storms that Jesus predicted comes, you can choose now to stay close to Him, to find Him to be your Shelter. He will be your Comforter if you let Him. Not only that, but your Friend, Your hiding place. Let your eye be the lamp to your body and see His light and truth over your feelings and pain.

Have no line, no limit, no pain that you can face in this life where you will stop trusting and following Christ.

One nugget I've learned in hardship: When you're faced with hardship, pain, difficulty, stress or an impossibility, how do you pray? START with HIM. Look at Him. Settle yourself first to see Him. When you can see Him, then look at your circumstance. This is how I've learned to live in faith and trust. A lack of peace will indicate that you need to press in more to see Him before you look at your circumstance.

So how do you cultivate believing God when you don't feel like He is there, ready to help you? Approach the Scriptures differently. Surrender to the Holy Spirit's leading, seek and listen as you read. I used to not experience God's love on a heart level. It was just head knowledge. Now, what helped me to experience truth more clearly was to posture myself in a different way, to receive it as real. So when I read it I have learned to read it with the Holy Spirit. It is like that scene in that Narnia movie/book when Edmond, Lucy and Eustace enter into the painting as they gazed at it. The more they gazed, they started to see the water shift with the blowing of the winds, until they entered into it. So if you don't feel like God is with you in a dark valley, Ps 23:4 says that You are with me in that dark valley. You then choose to sit with the Holy Spirit, seeking His ministry, and immerse yourself in this verse, you tell Him you don't feel it but this is truth, you settle into it, gaze and open your heart to hear it until it you can see that He is in fact with you.

Soul Idolatry

Well Illustration

I'll post this on my blog under GDG Resources. I hope you can use this as a tool for evangelism or discipleship with your friends. The resource is in the format of a training resource, to teach you how to use it in your relationships.

Soul Idolatry is such a major part of life and hindrance for growth as Jesus' disciple that I want to focus on this area today and develop it more in your understanding. I want to help equip you to recognize it in your life, see the temptations to avoid as you grow up and ultimately to find freedom and victory in the gospel of Christ. And in turn, help others. Most of my talk in this section comes from Tim Keller's teaching from Acts 19 at a Gospel Coalition conference. See GDG - Resources tab.

Pervasive

Think of a crowd of people: maybe it is seeing the crowd down the hallway at school, or the congregation during a church service, or all the people who are in the cars on a busy road, or even better, all the people on this globe. *Every person* struggles with soul idolatry. Physical idolatry is less prevalent these days in our culture. Rarely it will be a statue. But soul idolatry is everywhere. You can make anything into an idol.

What is Soul Idolatry? (See Ezekiel 16 and Rev 2 - Church in Thyatira)

The simplest and most foundational truth about life is this. God *first* LOVED us and His greatest commandment in all of life for us is to love Him back. We were made to be worshippers of God alone. So God loved us and we are to love Him back. That is it. We have addressed more detail about this intimacy with our week on Christ as the Bridegroom and we being His Bride. Or God is our Father and we are His children. The Holy Spirit now dwells in us. But these are embellishments of our LOVE RELATIONSHIP with God.

Soul idolatry is when we leave this and look to other things and raise it to the level of deity in our lives. God created us to be worshippers. When God is not the object of our worship, we, as worshippers, worship, deeply in

our hearts, created things. When we place something or someone else in God's place, give it an ultimate, central priority in our lives, we live in idolatry just like the Israelites.

If there is anything you are satisfied with, other than God, it is an idol.

When you look to anything to give you what only God can give you, that is idolatry.

It is some good thing you are looking to instead of God for salvation.

It is more crucial to your value, your meaning, your security, your confidence, your identity, your salvation, your significance than God. It is what gives you hope. It is what you look to for rescue, deliverance, comfort.

Idolatry is anything so central and ultimate for you, that you can't have a meaningful life if you lose it.

Anything you look at and in your heart you say, if I have that, then my life has value and meaning. If I lose that, I don't know how I can live.

Example: I think of my believer friend who was in college and she got into a dating relationship with a believer. She was madly in love with him. He gave her life love and meaning that she never got as a child. She gave her life to him. She poured herself and spiritually tied herself to him. They started to sleep with each other and she got pregnant. Devastated, she and he chose to get an abortion. Then one day he broke up with her. She was absolutely crushed and wanted to die. What she prized most was lost and struggled to live in the aftermath of losing her most prized possession. Do you see that he was her idol? She needed him. His rejection absolutely crushed her. The foundation of her life crumbled and she wanted to die because she wasn't with him anymore.

The Scriptures describe idols in two ways. On one hand, they are nothing. But on the other, they are unbelievably powerful b/c of the principalities and powers of the air, demons, the forces of darkness control us.

Examples

Here are examples of things we make idols into our lives. Note that many of these are good. But it is when we place the wrong value on them, when we give them the place only God is to have in our lives, then they become idols and we become slaves to them. We are enthralled to them.

a romance, human love, family, children, a friend's opinion and interaction with you, acceptance, affection, sex, intimacy, security, academic achievement, skills, abilities, physical beauty, career, money making, social standing, acclaim, fame, political or social cause, how people view you because of your religious activity, your ministry success, your competencies, your moral record, religiosity, self-expression, profit, a pain free life, health, your physical appearance, your image, your career, your wisdom, your dreams, your plans, your goals, your image of an ideal home, your accomplishments, your comfort, your pleasures, human reason, the approval of people, respect and validation from them, a person you want to emulate, a particular guy you want to value and desire you, a leader's attention and approval.

Often we don't recognize our idols because we have good values attached to them. For example, if money is your idol, you see yourself as "hard working." If your children are your idols, you see yourself as loving—but in fact, you base your identity and value on their opinion of you, or how well they turn out, or how others view your parenting. Religion can be your idol but you attach being devoted to God as the good value, but really inside, you care about how people view your religion and want them to approve and value you because of how good or successful a Christian you are. It is anything that you are trusting. Truth or rightness of doctrine might be your idol and it manifests as being dogmatic, disdainful or mocking. Moralism or legalism might be your idol and you think that God loves you because you are obeying. God has to bless me, you think. You trust in your good record instead of God and His righteousness. All these things are forms of worldliness.

Recognize it

There are personal, religious, cultural idols. Every person has them, our religion is infected with them, and each cultures and regions are riddled with various sets of idols.

We know these things have become idols when we see symptoms of it being a deity in our lives.

So you say, “I believe in God. I go to church.” But if your career, or a relationship or your ministry success goes south, you are absolutely crushed. You see that really, you are a slave to that idol. When you take a finite, limited, relative thing and make it an absolute, then you’ve created an idol and you are enslaved to it. Anything can be a god. I had a ministry leader years ago, who from the call of his idols, decided to leave his 3 children and wife and choose a homosexual lifestyle. He gave us his ministry career and the countless relationships he was influencing for Christ to follow his idol. We see his idol. Now look at the he was an idol to others in his ministry: when this all came out, I saw the people who were lead to Christ by him, those he loved and discipled, absolutely crushed by his moral failure and departure from Christ. He didn’t have that kind of history with me, so I thought it was puzzling how devastated certain people were at his decisions.

Why? When you lose one of these things, and it is just a good thing to you, then you’re sad. But if it has become an ultimate thing and you lose it, then you want to throw yourself off a bridge because you can’t live without it. That’s when you know it is an idol in your life.

Our idols become our masters—we serve them. We look to our gods to save us—we sacrifice to them. Take for example, the god of making a lot of money. Child sacrifice happens all the time today to the idol of money. Not in the traditional, physical sense, but when making money conflicts with the family’s needs, money making wins and the family is sacrificed...again and again. This happens all over the world in families, even Christian families. Do you see how we serve our idols? They dictate whatever they want and other values are subservient to their beck and call. You are in complete subservience to them. See how my friend sacrificed his family, his ministry, his career, his relationship with Christ even? His family is in a shambles, totally hurting, so very broken from all of his poor decisions that are because He was united to his idol.

We live with them, often without knowing, and it is when they are jeopardized, identified, called out on that we get defensive, or when they are taken away our lives are crushed. We don’t want to live. We sacrifice important things to serve our false gods. We love our false gods and commit spiritual adultery against God, our Bridegroom. They are poor masters that promise satisfaction or joy but never deliver. When they are threatened, there is chaos, confusion, violence. When enthralled by an idol, you look respectable on the outside, but when your idol is crossed, when we don’t get what we want, you judge others, you give the silent treatment as you brew in anger. Sometimes when you threaten that idol, they will threaten to kill you.

If you live for your career or anything else but God, it will punish you forever.

Apply the Gospel

Paul exposed the idols. He did this and risked his life. Note how the crowd were agitated in this setting. We need to do the same in our lives so as not to live under their power.

Acts 19:23-41

About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.”

When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul’s companions in travel. But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense

to the crowd. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, "Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion." And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

Paul saw idols everywhere. He discerned them and I hope we do.
Paul risked his life to defeat the powers and principalities.

For Jesus, it cost him his life. What happened to these idols when Jesus died on the Cross?

Col 2:15

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

On the Cross, when the powers of darkness and the principalities unleashed all their fury on the Son of God, He bowed his head, sunk to death. And in doing this he utterly defeated them. He disarmed the rulers and authorities, triumphing over them.

Jesus Christ, our true Bridegroom, came and took our punishment as spiritual adulterers deserved so that he can be both the Just and Justifier for those who believe and therefore so that He can punish our adultery and make us again His true Bride. They have only the power you give. But if you reject them, and turn to Jesus in repentance He can be your Master and Husband throughout life.

So what is going to help me pull my heart off of these things that my heart really loves more than Jesus?

I have to see Him as He really is. I have to see what He's done for me, know what He's done for me. This frees me from the powers and principalities that have been objectively defeated on the cross. Now this triumph comes into my life, giving me freedom to live from the power of these false gods and as a free child of God, led by the Spirit.

If you know how to live in the gospel and take the gospel to the idols of others? Then we can turn the world upside down.

Have God Alone as God

Look at your card for this week:

No person, no goal, no dream will satisfy you. It is find to have desires but they cannot take an central place in your heart. Don't be fooled by the human tradition that has taught us that we need x, y, or z....and then we will be happy. We get that message all the time in the media. This is the premise that commercials and movies are based on. You need this, then your life will be complete. Though these things are a part of life, they were never made to fulfill you. People are imperfect so no person, no relationship, no man will ever give you what you fully need. You were made to know God alone in this way.

I believe everyone wants a life filled with joy and contentment. You will be able to see a correlation between your walk with Jesus (the intensity, vibrancy, intimate nature) with how much contentment and joy you have. Much of this can be measured by your decisions, and your decisions will be based on what you desire. I hope that this study will open up aspects of how desirable God is and make you want more of Him. When you truly can see

Him, you will believe in your heart that He truly loves you, how satisfying He is and how perfect a relationship with Him is compared to all other things in this world—none of it compares.

There is a throne in your heart. Put nothing on that throne but God. When you find that you have symptoms of false gods there, throw them off and resist them, reject them, renounce them. Surrender yourself to God alone and worship God. Let God alone sit on that throne and make your love relationship be exclusive.

How differently your life can look between serving various false gods that won't deliver versus loving God alone.

Circle Illustration - only God Himself can satisfy Your heart. One use of our God given imagination is to let it raise our minds to the beautiful, the eternal, to God. Imagine living the rest of your life with the goal of loving God and know His love for you. Your love relationship with God being paramount.

Application Ideas

People's approval - we can go this route, where we do good things, even spiritual things, while seeking the approval of people. Why? because we don't really know the love of the Father. We do not see that they cannot give what we need. Only God can fill this insecurity. Only His opinion, evaluation of us matters. Until we know Him in this way, we have needs that are left unmet and we seek to meet them in wrong ways because we were made to seek to have our needs met, like breathing. It is our oxygen to have our needs met. But we get choked if we go to the wrong source for what we need. It is a broken well that will never satisfy.

Spouse choice - 3 keys on who to marry salvation, character, mission (mission might change, but the latter two are essential); so many things break up marriages—money, differing values, unfaithfulness, conflicting dreams,

I've seen so many marriages struggle, crumble, disintegrate, even among believers? It is our idols that break them apart because we serve them over what is best. Whether it is pornography, or ministry, adultery, or critical spirits. Take home lesson? Choose well who you enter into a romantic relationship, who you will marry. Have high standards. The less idols each of us have, the less trouble you will have. They won't have none, probably. You won't have none, probably. What idols each of you bring into the relationship and marriage will be the problems you will face together.

Prov 20:6

Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love,
but a faithful man who can find?

Marrying too early to a new believer - not tested, not seasoned, not made hard choices, nor faced persecution.

Romantic relationship. At first it feels good. You are on cloud 9. But remember Romans 1. Our human nature sets us to reject God and exchange the creature for God. The human heart is always fleeing from God. Oh that we would live always trusting God, believing God, and living to blessing others, where our love is not selfish.

But broken love is when a guy tells you he loves you out of his flesh. Where it is not Christ like love. His saying "I want you" is really a feeling he is speaking from within himself, it is really nothing about you. And when he is done with you, he will look for someone else to give him that feeling and he will discard you. Any romantic love that will last must be from Christ's agape love for it to last and be as God intended marital love to be.

My husband is reading a book by a Puritan writer named Scougal. God alone needs to be the ultimate worthy object of our love. If you love anything but God in that central place of your heart, you will inevitably suffer pain as a result. Nothing is a worthy object of your ultimate love. A person disappoint you and may not return your love in the way you want to be loved. You might face separation or death. Miseries in the other person's life will bring your life down. God alone is worthy of being our central object of our love.

Conclusion

Colossians 2:8-10

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Notice deception in that verse? Why would he say the word *captive*? What an amazing thought that all of God is in Jesus and we have been filled in Him!

We humans have a God shaped vacuum in our hearts. Only God can fill this vacuum. You will find that as you try to fill this vacuum with anything else, it will leave you unsatisfied, empty, broken.

French mathematician, philosopher and believer from the 1600s, Blaise Pascal said,

“What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God Himself.”

From Blaise Pascal's *Pensees* p. 75 (New York; Penguin Books, 1966)

Choices. You only have today. So making good choices each day is how you will establish patterns in your life and draw out the path that you will walk. Whether you get to the goals that you have set for yourself, depends on your vision now and the choices you made progressively. But since you only have today, your daily goals are important and critical. What is your daily goals? What choices will you make today/tomorrow?

I don't always meet my goal, but having a goal helps you aim higher than just living on automatic mode. Here's my daily goal:

My daily goal is to learn how to engage with God in every moment, every thought—this is what I believe is to be led by the Holy Spirit. I want intimacy with God in every moment because He wants that with me. Every moment is spiritual. So if I face a pitfall, I have to readjust myself to press in to God in a new way, to let the pitfall usher me into a new knowledge and experience of God to meet me, be my Guide, my Life, my Love til I see Him face to face. I want to learn how to live in God's constant Presence because He never leaves me.

What power, intimate fellowship and joy can be ours, across the globe, if we all learn how to do this!