



Designing A Great Year

7 Simple exercises to help you
plan the best year of your life.

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Designing a great year

Every January during the past 10 years, I have gathered with friends to plan the year ahead. We have met at the local coffee shop or rented out a room at a local resort. This year we met via video conference. The purpose of our time together is to talk, reflect, dream and plan the year ahead by answering the questions below and getting feedback from one another. Below is the framework for our annual meetings to help us pursue a year of excellence. This is our framework for designing a great year.

While you can certainly answer most of these questions on your own, I highly recommend you engage with others. With community comes accountability and perspective both of which are not as easy to attain by oneself.

The purpose of these seven words and exercises is to help you learn from others, to begin with the end in mind, be grateful, have a great vision for the year ahead, to live life on purpose, pursuing your highest priorities, to build up others, to love and be loved.

Words have power especially the words we say to ourselves. One way to use words is to change what we say. A powerful exercise is to replace the phrase “I have to” with “I get to.” Next time you have to take out the garbage, try saying “I get to take out the garbage.” Or instead of “I have to workout,” to “I get to workout.” Or “I have to make dinner for my family” versus “I get to make dinner for my family.” When you “get to,” you realize the gift is in “getting to.” This is something you are doing with intention. The phrase “I have to make dinner for my family” carries resentment, obligation, and lack of gratitude. When you say, “I get to make dinner,” what you are saying is, “I am grateful I have a family to make dinner for; I get to provide them with nutrition; I get to delight them with something that tastes excellent; I get to make a meal for them; I get to show them how much I love them.” Words are important. Especially the words we use to talk to ourselves. As I was thinking about this idea of “have to” vs “get to,” I listened to the song **One** by U2 below are a few of the lyrics.

*U2 - One: One love, one blood One life you've got to do what you should. One life with each other sisters and my brothers One life but were not the same. We **get to** carry each other, carry each other*

These words and exercises I am about to share with you have evolved during the years. Use these exercises to make this your best year ever.

Wisdom

"Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding." Proverbs 4:6-7 NIV

Exercise one: Gain Collective Wisdom

Write down the most important pearl of wisdom you discovered in the previous year. It could be related to relationships, physical fitness, your spiritual life, finances or anything at all.

Ask your friends to share their most important bit of wisdom from the previous year. Write down what they share and discuss these ideas as a group.

"Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." Matthew 18:20 NIV

The End

"Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid thinking you have something to lose." Steve Jobs

The inevitable end of each human life is the death of the body. Some of the most significant utterances of a person's life will happen moments before they die.

As Steve Jobs' family gathered around him and as he took his final breath he said, "Oh Wow, Oh Wow, Oh Wow."

George Harrison said. "Love one another."

Michael Landon said, "You're right. It's time. I love you all."

Knowing that He had defeated sin, Satan and death, Jesus uttered, "It is finished," before dying on the cross.

Exercise two: Begin with the end in mind

Imagine yourself on your deathbed, surrounded by family and friends. As you draw your last breath, what is the one thing you want to say to them? Write it down. Practice it. Be ready.

Gratitude

"I don't have to chase extraordinary moments to find happiness - it's right in front of me if I'm paying attention and practicing gratitude." Brene Brown

Experiencing and expressing gratitude is one of the most important ways to live a rich life.

"Always giving thanks to God the father for everything ..." Ephesians 5:20 NIV

Exercise three: Practice gratitude

To provoke your sense of gratitude, open up the photo app on your phone. Scroll to the pictures from the past year, and start looking at them one by one.

Looking at photos provokes your memory. As you remember, write down the most important memories. What made that moment so great? How do you feel when you look at the photo?

Once you've looked through your photos, print off three that incite gratitude for you. These photos will serve as reminders to offer prayers of thanksgiving and to express gratitude to people and experiences that you care about. Who are the people and what were the experiences that made the previous year great? Allow these memories to be your guide for creating more of these moments in the coming year.

It is important to know who and what lights you up.

Purpose

"You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers. You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions." Naguib Mahfouz

Living a great year requires a clear sense of purpose.

Exercise four: Create a purpose statement

Below are some big picture questions that will help you understand what matters most to you. Your answers will help you craft a purpose statement for the coming year.

What's the purpose of your money?

Your doctor says you have one year to live.

- **How will you spend your time?**
- **Who would you spend your time with?**

This time, you go to the doctor, and the doctor says you have just one week to live. As you reflect on your life:

- **What are you most proud of?**
- **What is your greatest regret**
- **What needs to be said?**
- **What needs to be resolved?**
- **Who needs to be forgiven?**

Imagine yourself one year from now. Looking back over the previous year answer these questions:

- **Who did you love?**
- **How did they know they were loved?**

Using your answers, you'll create a purpose statement for the year to come.

Life is not a dress rehearsal, you only get one shot.

My name is _____, and I'm going to live my best life. The purpose of my money is _____

I realize that time is a gift, and I will spend my time with: _____

When we are together, we will: _____

I've lived my life to be most proud of: _____

I will avoid living a life of regrets by not allowing: _____

I have forgiven_____ and I will no longer carry the weight of unforgiveness:

I will love_____ and they will know it by _____

I will love_____ and they will know it by _____

I will love_____ and they will know it by _____

I will love_____ and they will know it by _____

I will live and love my best life.

Priorities

“The most important thing in life is knowing the most important things in life.”

David F. Jakielo

You may not have the time or resources to do everything you want. Honing in on your top priorities will help you spend your time and resources more wisely and pursue your greatest purpose.

Exercise five: One Thing

Set a timer for three minutes. Start the timer, and write the ONE THING you want to achieve in each of these areas of your life in the next year. Don't think too hard about it because the real answer is likely whatever pops into your head. When the timer stops, stop writing.

Lifestyle -Relationships -Physical

Mental -Spiritual- Family

Career- Financial

Now circle the top three words or phrases. These are the things that are truly important to you right now. These are your top three goals or priorities for the year ahead.

Seeking

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” Matthew 7:7 NIV

The first time you go to the google webpage. You are greeted with the word Google and an empty box inviting you to search. What will you search for? Is it good? Or is it bad? Google does not tell you what to search for, it just gives you the option to search.

Watching cable news, reading the morning newspaper, or scrolling through social media accounts often feels like an exercise in finding the worst aspects of the human experience. You did not seek these things out, but they have been delivered to you.

If we hope to experience peace, joy and contentment, then we must seek those things out. We must also protect our minds from being manipulated to see things that we never wanted to see in the first place.

Exercise six: Become a good finder

To help you find the good in the people you love, write down one thing you experienced yesterday that shows off the best characteristics in the people you love. Write down one experience for each of the people in your purpose statement. Keep it short and simple. Just one short sentence.

We must train ourselves to look for the good. I challenge you to, everyday for one year, write down one thing you love about the people in your life. This journal is not for them. It is for you. It helps you to focus on the good. Looking for the good in others will help you to realize how good your life is. It helps to train you to become a good finder. Because what you search for, what you seek and you will find.

Ultimate Value

*“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” 1 John 4:8
NIV*

Raising a family, serving customers and building a business are all important goals. This challenge is to receive love and be loving. Who you love is the engine that propels you towards your life's greatest purpose.

Exercise seven: Love

Starting and deepening your relationship with God is essential for living a life that will have a lasting effect across generations.

“If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:2 NIV

Today, spend a few moments reading and reflecting on these Bible verses. Let this simple exercise launch you towards a year filled with discovering, glorifying and delighting in God's love for you. When you know what it is to be loved. You will know what it is to love. And when you know why you are loved and who you love, you will have clarity for how to spend your time and who to spend your time with.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 NIV

"The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.'" Jeremiah 31:3 NIV

"Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Matthew 22:37-3 NIV

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NIV

How are you loved?

Who will you love?

How did they know they were loved?

I hope these seven simple exercises help you to design and live a great year.