

# **A Resilient Life Self-Study**

- - - - -

**To be used in conjunction with  
*A Resilient Life*  
By  
Gordon MacDonald**

Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity.....do not neglect the gift which was given you....watch your life and doctrine closely....persevere in them. Paul to Timothy, *1 Timothy 4*

**This material may not be reproduced without the permission of the author  
Copyright LDI (Leadership/Discipleship Initiative)**

## Introduction

**The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes --Marcel Proust**

The owner's manual that comes with your new automobile urges you to return to the dealer for service and maintenance every time your odometer reaches a certain mileage.

Your doctor, your dentist and, if you have one, your ophthalmologist feel the same way about annual examinations. You probably get similar notifications from the furnace, the heavy appliance, and the exterminating people.

Their message? Moderately priced checkups are lot more sensible than the repair and replacement costs if and when things break down later.

In a variety of ways the Biblical writers urged the same preventive maintenance in the conduct of one's life. "Examine yourselves..." St. Paul twice wrote to the Corinthians. "Watch your life and your doctrine closely....," he coached Timothy. There are all sorts of hints that the man practiced what he preached: an inward and an outward look to see if his life was properly tuned for maximum effectiveness.

The wise man or woman checks him/herself regularly, perhaps even on a daily basis as part of the exercise of private worship and devotion. Attitudes, intentions, feelings, priorities, relationships, personal resources: Are they all in general alignment with one's sense of God's purposes? On a longer range basis: alignment with one's call, one's goals, and one's convictions.

But then there are certain *greater moments* during the course of one's life. Six or eight of them perhaps? Moments when one makes a fresh decision about new directions in life. Moments when a person has failed and needs to make midcourse corrections. Moments when there seems to be a loss of personal power or vision and life has gone "flat." Or, another possibility: moments when one becomes convinced that he/she could do better, go deeper, accomplish more.

In such *greater moments* it seems a wise thing to push the pause button in life and make a personal assessment.

- Where have I been? What have I learned? What's going well, and what's not going well?
- Where am I.....right now? Spiritually, relationally, vocationally, intellectually, emotionally? Do I like who I am? Am I even close to what I perceive have been God's intentions for my life?

- Where do I believe I should be in five, ten, even fifteen years from now? What kind of a man or woman do I want to be then? What does God have to say to me about such possibilities?

*A Resilient Life Self-Study* is a simple guide to aid in pinning those questions down to useful, practical answers. It emerges out of personal experience and from coaching men and women who have felt an urgency to examine their own lives.

**Requirements: (See “Doing This Alone or in a Small Group” in Attachments)**

Desire to take a hard look at one’s life and where it seems to be going;

Agreement from one’s spouse and/or close friends to support such a venture;

Time: a few hours each week, perhaps a weekend or two over a 60-day period in order to read, reflect, talk, write, pray;

Discipline: a determination to see the project through to its end and then put its conclusions into action;

If possible have someone administer a Myers-Briggs Temperament Indicator. If you have done one in the past, make sure it is updated. **See Attachment on this important item.**

**Downsides?**

Don’t dive into this unless you are fully determined to see it through. You don’t want any more disappointments.

You may have to face a little bit of pain if some truth surfaces that you’ve been trying to avoid. There may be some disciplines you’re going to have to re-start.

There may be a discovery of some limits and boundaries you haven’t wanted to live with.

On the other hand there may be some challenges and opportunities God has for you that you haven’t wanted to face.

### **A Word from Gordon MacDonald**

Twenty-five years ago I came to one of those (what I call) *greater moments* in the course of my own life. For me, the moment emerged out of a sudden personal failure after almost 25 previous years of fast-track living as a pastor, writer, and all the other stuff that comes with life in the Evangelical Christian world. .

I remember this so-called *greater moment* as one marked with gloom, self-accusation, fear, and suffocating shame. I can't imagine what would have happened to me if I had not had a durable marriage and family, certain very faithful friends, a strong history in Christian faith, and a collection of personal disciplines which I'd acquired over the previous years. God used these things to carry me through those very dark days.

But there was also a bright side to that time. I realized that I had received a special gift under strange circumstances. The fast-paced life full of expectations and obligations had come to a screeching halt. Now in this *greater moment* there were long periods of silence and relative inactivity. Ironically, I had what I often longed for: a time to think, to assess, to see if God had anything new to say to me.

In those days my mental picture was that of Moses' desert—the one where he spent 40 years getting his act together before hearing God's call to liberate the Hebrews. While Peace Ledge, then our New England home, was hardly a desert, it became a similar quiet place which was free of disruptions. I set about—in concert, I hoped, with God's Spirit and those closest to me—to reconstruct my life.

Many months later I could confidently say that I'd examined every nook and cranny of my life—at least that part of it that was available to scrutiny. I had examined myself:

- As a man (crossing the mid-life line);
- As a Christ-follower (the strengths and weaknesses);
- As a husband (Could I make my wife, Gail, feel more secure in my love?);
- As a father (Could I be even more present to my children?);
- As a friend (Why wasn't I a better friend?);
- As a sinner (What of the deeper, darker, unresolved aspects of myself?);
- As one willing to make my life-priority the kingdom of God (Did God still have a claim on my life? Was there any future?).

There are many aspects of this time more than twenty years ago that I have written about in a book called *Rebuilding Your Broken World* (Published: Thomas Nelson, 1988, 1990, 2003).

In other places I have written about a strange question that loomed in my mind during those dark days. Assuming that God might give me forty more years to live, the question sounded like this: "What kind of an old man do you want to be if

and when you reach the age of 87?" (*The Life God Blesses*: Thomas Nelson, 1994,97)

This question moved me beyond mere self-assessment (something based on the past) to deliberate life planning (something that anticipated a future). Could the second half of my life be better than the first half? Could I, by the power of God in me, deepen my character, strengthen my relationships, enlarge my faith, become more focused and more effective as a servant of Jesus?

I became convinced that the answer was **yes** to all of these things. Now, many years later, I know that **yes!** was the right answer. At 67, I am more excited about life than I ever was before; I am more in love with my wife than in the past; I enjoy searching and supportive friendships; and, perhaps most importantly, my love for Jesus and my passion to serve Him is more intense than ever.

By the way--have I discovered a perfect system of Christian living? No. Am I through struggling? No. Are there some dark moments? Yep. But would I change the journey I'm on? Very, very little.

I believe that my view of life today is a direct result of my decision back in that *greater moment* to engage in self-study and be as ruthless with myself as was possible.

Today, I have urged scores of men and women—usually living lives in the leadership fishbowl—to do a similar thing.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Ordering the *Self-Study***

I have decided to avoid all the processes of publishing (marketing, editing, streamlining for business purposes) and make this self-study guide available on a personal basis.

The guide is constructed as a Word.doc file and sent via an email attachment to anyone who asks for it. Payment is on an honor-based system.

\$10.00 if you print out one copy for yourself

\$5.00 each time you print out a copy for members of your organization or family.

Payment is by check made out to *Gordon MacDonald*, and sent to Box 319, Belmont, New Hampshire, 03220.

You can order the complete *Self-Study* guide with an email to [Gordon@Canterburypartners.com](mailto:Gordon@Canterburypartners.com)

### **Getting Ready**

In my opinion (and that's what most of this treatment is: merely "my opinion"), the following checklist should describe an effort in self-study.

Purchase a sturdy notebook (loose-leaf or spiral-bound) that will become a record of all your thoughts and discoveries during the self-study period. Call it a journal (which is what I do), a log, an autobiography or anything else that suits you. Make this journal your temporary “best friend.” Do not be reluctant to write any or all thoughts you have as you make your way through the *self-study*.. **See Attachment**

### First Steps

(1) Find an hour when you are not fatigued, overly distracted, vulnerable to interruptions (including cell phones or blackberrys or “anything else in all creation”). Take as many notes as you can starting on page 1 of your journal using the title: **Getting Started**.. Follow the brainstorming style i.e., every idea is a valid idea in the pursuit of this question: ***what are all the things going on in my life right now that cause me to want to take a hard look at myself?*** Don’t cheat yourself in doing this exercise. Don’t walk away from the question until you are convinced that you have exhausted all possible answers. (Biblical meditations for this exercise might include: Genesis 4.1-9; Genesis 32.22-32; Exodus 2.11-15, 3.1-10; 33.7-23; Psalm 139. In one way or another each of these Scriptures is about the interior look.

(2) Think through the following questions and write out your answers in your journal. Use the Title: **Making Commitments**. Write as if you were dialoguing with yourself:

- Is there a 60 day period when I could strip away all superfluous or non-essential activities in an effort to gain “un-interruptible” time for self-study? This means certain evenings (or mornings, etc) when the exclusive agenda would be self-study. Perhaps a weekend or two. It also means that you would schedule only those activities that were essential to your work, to the health of your family, etc. But most discretionary time would be earmarked for self-study.

Done\_\_\_\_\_

- Am I willing to ask my family, those to whom I am accountable in my work, my friends to support my effort? Who might be on my “personal Board?” (See **Attachment**)

Done\_\_\_\_\_

- Do I feel strongly enough to see this personal venture through to its conclusion? Who will hold me accountable? Am I willing to “blow off the lid” of my life and examine events and struggles that may be a bit painful in their recalling?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

- Am I seriously prepared to obey those things that I perceive God is saying to me through Scripture, through confidants, through self-discovery?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

If you are married, confide your conclusions to your spouse (or if single with one or two close friends). Ask if they would be willing to cooperate with you on the self-study venture. Promise that you will be pleased to provide regular progress reports on your efforts.

- You will be asking them to write you a memo or a letter in which they help you in making some personal assessments of yourself.
- You will be asking them to meet with you on at least three occasions to review your conclusions.
- You will be asking them to hold you accountable to complete your commitments and put your conclusions into motion.
- You will be asking them to uphold you in prayer particularly on those special days or weekends when you seclude yourself.

Done\_\_\_\_\_

If you are accountable to a boss or a board, inform them of your intentions. If your work is in the profit sector, you will have to determine for yourself how receptive your boss or supervisor will be to your stated intention.

- If a board or supervisor in the nonprofit sector, you will want them to know that you are taking personal time to engage in a self-study (not organizational time). And—assuming you are comfortable with this—you would more than appreciate their cooperation (an interview, perhaps, that would help your self-assessment).
- If a boss in the profit-sector: Would he/she be willing to engage in a conversation that focused on your strengths and weaknesses?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Study your personal calendar carefully. Identify a 60 day period where you could carve out significant quantities of quieter time for self-study. This means withdrawing from all activities that are not essential to your work or the interests of your family. You will want to have at least two free weekends as well as two free evenings (no distractions) per week. Hopefully, you will have determined to set aside an hour each day for personal reflection and worship.

- You will have to be sure that your time period has the support of your spouse and any others with whom you are personally involved. They must agree to support you in these time choices.
- You will want to designate a place where you can find quietness and privacy.
- It would be beneficial if you could budget some time at the end of each of the three 20 periods simply to reflect on your progress and what you have learned so far.

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Take note of the things that are most likely to distract or interrupt you during your reflective times:

- Phones, e-mail traffic?
- Background music? Television?
- Work associates who might insensitively intrude?
- Family members?
- Books, magazines lying around that compete for attention?

What are you going to do about them? Your journal awaits an answer.

Done\_\_\_\_\_

**Review:** Study the following statements and ask yourself if you are prepared to respond with a positive answer. Until you are 100% positive about every statement, don't go beyond this page.

\_\_\_\_\_ You have made a sincere commitment to follow Jesus.

\_\_\_\_\_ You are prepared to be honest with yourself, to follow the evidence of your thoughts and insights.

\_\_\_\_\_ You are prepared to spend some reflective time on each of the next 60 days.

\_\_\_\_\_ You are willing to bring spouse and close friends along side to help you.

\_\_\_\_\_ You are prepared to do some reading and writing.

\_\_\_\_\_ You are prepared to make some changes in your way of life when God speaks to you.

\_\_\_\_\_ You passionately desire that the second half of



your life be better than the first half.

\_\_\_\_\_ You want, more than anything else, to know and obey God's purposes for you.

Done\_\_\_\_\_

### **Time to Begin!**

Your 60-day self-study will be divided (roughly) into three 20 day periods. Don't panic if you get a day or two behind. If you get a week or more behind, then panic might be useful.

The first 20 days will be spent looking backwards: recalling your story.

The second 20 days will be spent looking at your life as it is today. As you look at yourself *right now*, what do you see? But don't worry; you have a month before we get there.

The third 20 days will be, hopefully, the most enjoyable. You'll spend your time looking ahead, planning, listening, experimenting, and setting some standards for the next few years.

When you reach the sixtieth day, let's hope you are a lot wiser person than you are today. Let's dare to dream that you feel a greater intimacy with God, with those closest to you, and with yourself.

### **A Reflection**

Read the story of St. Paul's conversion and his later reflection on his life (Acts 9.1-19 and 26.12-19). Spend a few minutes with the following questions and comments. and use your journal to record your thoughts.

1. Do you know two or three people whose lives are similarly marked with such purposefulness? What characterizes these people?
2. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest), how satisfied are you regarding the purposefulness of your life?
3. What do you think are the significant obstacles to your pursuit of a purposeful life?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

## The First Twenty Days

**Note: Do not begin the first 20 days until you have selected your personal Board of three to five directors and obtained their agreement to participate in the self-study.**

Done\_\_\_\_\_

The self-study will be divided into thirds, each 20 days long.

The first 20 days takes us back into our pasts. **The objective:** to look backward, and to collect our feelings and convictions about the things that have formed us, directed us, and either helped or harmed us.

Some people would rather turn away from the past; It can be painful. Then again, there are some of us who simply see no value in looking backward. Everything is *future* to us.

The Bible seems to encourage occasional and significant backward looks. God consistently reminded people of their history and what it taught them. Paul wrote, "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragements of the Scriptures we might have hope."

Israel was taught to look to its past by building memorials and monuments, by retelling stories over and over again, and through liturgical efforts such as feasts and forms of worship.

Even the genealogies of the Bible—not necessarily exciting reading—are there to remind us that people have a past (good or bad) and it has to be dealt with.

One cannot look into the possibilities of the future, nor can he/she have much hope of growing if we do not deal with the darkness and the brightness of our stories. The following readings, both from *A Resilient Life* and the Scriptures, are designed to point us to the value of recollecting the past. The various experiences will be challenging. Don't give up on them, and don't get behind.

### **Scan the entire 20 plan before starting.**

Each 20 day period will have a reading plan. Read only one assigned chapter in a day, and make sure that you have plenty of time to respond to any questions in your journal.

Each period will have Scriptures to study. Be careful to record thoughts in your journal.

Finally, each period will have action items.

Read the entire 20 day section through before you begin, and create a calendar for the completion of each reading, study, and action item. Set a meeting time with your Board for the final days of the 20 day period.

# The First Twenty Day Plan

## Your Reading Plan

(Record your responses in your journal)

**Make your biographical study decision (see Attachment at end of *Self-Study*). Construct your plan for studying this person's life.**

Done\_\_\_\_\_

**Pick two of the books from the General Reading list (see attachment) and construct your plan for reading them. Books are available from Amazon or libraries.**

Done\_\_\_\_\_

### Daily Readings

Read RL(*A Resilient Life*) "Introduction:" Who have been the "Marvin Goldbergs" in your life and what have been the one or two most important principles they have taught you? Challenge yourself to find at least ten names. Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: "*Quitting is Not an Option*" (Chapter 1): If the author has identified a "quitters" gene, what similar genes might you find in yourself if you looked back over your life? Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: "*Walking is Unthinkable*" (Chapter 2): What are three to five issues in and around your life that would tempt you to give up on your most important wishes and goals in life? Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: "*Building Resilience is a Daily Pursuit*" (Chapter 3): Write a single paragraph in your journal about the meaning of personal discipline in your life-journey. Has it come naturally to you? Has it been a battle? What has shaped your view of personal discipline? Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: "*The Face of Aimlessness*" (Chapter 4): Know anyone like this person? Is there any of him in you? What feelings and emotions rise up in you as you read about him? Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: "*The Face of a Champion*" (Chapter 5): What qualities leap off the page into your heart and make you want to be this kind of a person? Who do you know that resembles this man? What causes you to make this selection? Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: "*Resilient People Run Free of the Weight of the Past...In Losing There is Learning*" (Preface to Chapter 12): As you look over the course of your life, identify up to five lessons you have had to learn the hard way. Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Understand the Importance of Repairing the Past*” (Chapter 12): When have there been times in your life when you found forgiveness a difficult challenge? Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Respect the Power of Memory*” (Chapter 13): Identify one childhood experience (sad or pleasant) that seems to play an active role in the kind of person you are today. Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Practice Repentance*” (Chapter 14): Review the three ways people set out to repair their pasts. Which seems to be the dominant pattern in your life journey? Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People are Quick to Forgive*” (Chapter 15): Describe a critical moment in your life when you had to face the challenge of forgiving someone. Questions to ponder: How hard was it for you? Why? What was the result (for you, for the person forgiven?) Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Overflow with Gratitude*” (chapter 16): To what extent is the expression of gratitude a natural part of your life? How do you feel when people fail to thank you? Who are three to five people in your world who deserve greater expressions of appreciation than you have been offering? If they are alive, write letters to them outlining your sense of appreciation. Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Squeeze the Past for all its Wisdom*” (chapter 17): Who are three of the wisest people you know? What characterizes them? How did they get that way? How would you rate yourself as a “question-asker?” Done\_\_\_\_\_

## **Scripture Reflections**

(Record your responses in your journal)

The story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50)

What were his family relationships like?

- His father
- His brothers

What were the realities and pressures he faced in Egypt?

What can be said about his developing character?

How did he handle the later relationship with his brothers?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

The story of David (I Samuel 16-27; II Samuel 1-13; I Kings 1-2.11)

What do you think it did to David to be excluded from the original selection process when Samuel came to Jesse’s house seeking a king?

What hints are there about David’s relationship to his brothers?

What character traits emerge in David as he becomes a man?

What do you sense are David’s personal weaknesses?

What are David’s leadership strengths?

Where does he put himself at risk (morally, spiritually, relationally)?  
What can be said about the way David brings his life to a conclusion?  
Done\_\_\_\_\_

The story of Paul (Acts 6-28; Philippians)

What character traits can be seen in Saul when he first appears in Scripture?

As Paul grew in his faith, what personal challenges do you think he faced in the conduct of his own life?

What qualities emerge in Paul's life when you read his Philippian letter?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

## **Twenty-Day Action Items**

Collecting Memories  
(Record your responses in your journal)

Here are some questions to mull over in your mind. If one or another has no easy or obvious answer, pass over it and go on to the next one. Their purpose? To get your memory going.

1. Where were you born?
2. What is the meaning of your name? Do you know why your parents chose your name?
3. What were the significant occupations of your father and your mother?
4. Where were you situated in the birth order of your brothers and sisters (first, last, middle, etc)?
5. Where was your first home located? (Your second and third, etc?)
6. What is your first memory of getting into any kind of trouble with your parents or neighbors?
7. Who do you remember as your first "best friend"? Describe the quality of the friendship.
8. What is the first church you remember attending as a child? What were the best and the worst experiences?
9. How did your parents feel about faith? What did you see in them that led you to (or detracted you from) faith?
10. What is your first memory of a serious disappointment?

11. What do you remember as your most prized toy or plaything?
12. What do you remember as your first fear?
13. What do you remember as the warmest place in your childhood home?
14. Who do you think you admired most as a child and why?
15. Do you remember your childhood as a happy one or sad?
16. Who do you think you most resemble, your father or your mother?
17. How would you describe your relationship to your siblings?
18. What was your first paying job? Was it a happy or unhappy experience?
19. What do you remember of your first impressions of God?
20. When did you make your first conscious commitment to Jesus?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

## **Major Activities**

Make appointments to visit at least five people (parents and relatives, friends, teachers, mentors, neighbors) who have known you in the earlier years of your life. If you cannot visit them in person, ask for a phone appointment (an hour talking time) or, if necessary, an exchange of correspondence.

- Explain that you are engaging in a self-study.
- You would like them to recall as much as they possible can of the kind of person you were in younger years.
- Ask about their impressions of your personality, character, abilities.
- What major events in your life can they describe to you?
- Did they have any expectations of what you might become? Any fears?

## **Writing Your Story**

(Suggestion: Do your preparatory work in your journal. Write your story on a computer file so that you can freely edit it, adding and deleting as your thoughts develop.)

Every person has a story. And every story is interesting. In the exercise of studying oneself, the recovery of one's story is very important. The 20 questions you have worked through should provide a helpful beginning for your effort.

Some of us know our stories quite well. We have diaries and scrapbooks and boxes of photographs. But some of us have lost track of our stories. Perhaps because there was too much sadness in the past, and it seemed better to bury things rather than exhume them. Some of us may be ashamed of our stories. And some of us may be convinced that our stories are so uninteresting that it is not worth resurrecting them.

In Biblical times a person's story and the family line that produced them were of inestimable importance. Any Bible reader knows that the Scriptures are filled with the stories of men and women and things of significance (and trivia) that happened to them.

During these 20 days you will want to organize your story if you want to get more deeply into your own life and how it has evolved. The more diligent of us will set a goal to literally write an autobiography of 15-20 pages before these first 30 days are finished. And some of us will be content to merely recount our lives in short orderly statements...in bullet form. Here's an important thought: Don't cheat yourself by taking the easy way out. Challenge, push yourself to the most thorough job you can do on your story.

Imagine your life broken up into several five-year pieces (0-5 years; 5-10 years, etc). If you are 46 years old, you've got 9 pieces; if you are 60, you've got 12.

You will want to examine each of the five-year pieces seeking the answer to these four important questions:

During each five year period:

1. Who were the three to five most prominent people in your life who influenced you for good or ill? And what was the contribution of each?
2. What were the most important three to five ideas by which you conducted your life?
3. What were the three to five most dramatic or critical events which happened that profoundly changed your life?
4. What place did God have in your life during this period?

*This is important!* Don't even think about trying to sprint through this project in an hour, in a day, or even a week. You might want to do your work in "pencil," because if you do your very best, you'll make a lot of changes before the exercise is finished.

Here are several suggestions:

- Set aside several pages for each five-year period.



- Sit down with family members or friends who were involved in your life during each period and encourage them to recall the kind of person you were at that time. Encourage their candor and listen to them carefully. Take lots of notes.
- If you struggle with a foggy memory, go back to the questions you answered on Day 3. They will provide a structure to jog the memory on more difficult things.
- Your story should be about 20 full pages in length. If read aloud, it should take approximately 50 minutes.

## **Coming to Twenty-Day Conclusions**

(Record your responses in your journal)

As you reach the end of the first 20 days of your self-study, you want to know the following things:

1. How well do I know the things (people, events, ideas) that have influenced the kind of person I am?
2. Are there any issues in my past that remain unresolved and leave me confused, uneasy, or with a feeling of incompleteness?
3. Are there any things I need to make right in my past (repentance, forgiveness, gratitude)?
4. Are there habit patterns or character traits that I have identified that are in need of change?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

## **Meeting with your Self-Study Board**

### **Agenda**

- Describe your overall 20 day experience to them. Invite their questions.
- Read your story to them. Again, invite questions.
- Review your 20 day conclusions with them. Invite questions.
- Concluding general discussion: What do you and the Board hear God saying throughout this process? Does the Board have any suggestions to you about your self-study process?
- Ask Board members if they will each prepare a memo for the next meeting (in

20 days) that includes the following material:

Their impressions of your personality;  
Three marks that describe your character;  
Their estimates of your spiritual gifts;  
Their sense of your most important contributions  
to the people around you;  
Some challenging thing they think you could  
achieve in the future;  
The one thing they think could threaten your  
hopes for greater growth and effectiveness.

- Set a date for your next Board meeting at the end of the 40<sup>th</sup> day  
(Date \_\_\_\_\_)

## The Second Twenty-Day Plan

You are in the middle third of your 60 day self-study. The emphasis now switches to the present tense of your life: today.

**The objective?** To take a hard look at who you are in your world.....*right now*.

The basic approach to the second 20 days will be the same as the first: reading, reflection, action items and conclusions. As you complete each action item, mark it “done” so that you have a clear perception of your progress.

**Ask your spouse or a close friend to write a letter to you that covers these topics: (due at the end of this 20 day period)**

- When I think of you I give thanks for these things.....
- My greatest dreams for you in the next 10 years are.....
- My deepest concerns for you are.....
- My hopes for our personal relationship are.....

The “ask” has been done\_\_\_\_\_

## Your Reading Plan

**Gut check on your biographical and general reading:** How are you doing?

Read RL: “*Resilient People Train to Go the Distance*” (Preface to Chapter 18): Write a short story in your journal about an occasion that is similar to the author’s race experience. It should be about a time when someone started fast (a project, a relationship, a life goal) and then failed to finish. What happened, and why did they fail to “go the distance?” The story can be about you or someone else.

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Prepare Themselves for the ‘Emergencies’ of Life*” (Chapter 18): In your journal recall a time and circumstances when you were forced to face the issue of discipline....either because you had it or didn’t have it.

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Know Exactly What has to be Accomplished*” (Chapter 19): Who do you know that possesses the traits of a disciplined person (in the healthiest sense of that word). What impresses you about them? What do you admire most?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Keep Themselves Physically Fit*” (Chapter 20): The author has written, “One breakdown in self-mastery leads to others.” Do you agree or disagree? Have you ever set out to pursue a certain discipline

somewhere in your life and then given up? What happened? What made you quit? How have you felt about abandoning the discipline?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Grow Their Minds*” (Chapter 21): From your perspective: What are the things that encourage good thinking (see Chesterton’s comment about Lincoln) and the things that discourage good thinking?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Harness Their Emotions*” (Chapter 22): Where have you seen examples of people who have not disciplined their emotions? What does it do to the people who have to be around them? In contrast, can you come up with a story or two of people who disciplined their emotions in a healthy way?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Trim Their Egos*” (Chapter 23): Under what circumstances would you find your ego “swelling” out of control? Which of the ways that the author speaks of trimming the ego means most to you?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Open Their Hearts to the Presence of God*” (Chapter 24): Write a brief description of an occasion in your life when you felt you had “opened your heart to God” and experienced an unusual sense of heavenly closeness.

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Run in the Company of a “Happy Few”*” (Preface to Chapter 24): Have you ever experienced a change in a relationship such as the one the author describes when his *coach* became his *friend*? In your journal describe the experience. If you cannot recall such an experience, write a fictional account as you imagine this happening.

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*The Value of Linger*ing” (Chapter 25): “When you’ve been a pastor all your life, most gatherings of people mean serious conversation about problems and programs. You feel responsible....It’s work....A virtuous work.” In what way can you adapt this comment to your world? Reflect on this in your journal.

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*The Peril of the Solitary Life*” (Chapter 26): List the 10 “best friends” (of the same gender) you have had in your life and the dates during which those relationships existed. Start with your childhood in making the list. What kept some relationships going, and why do you think some dissolved?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*How Friendship Works*” (Chapter 27): Reread the author’s description of the day he walked the Swiss Alps with his friend Al. Write a paragraph

describing the effect this experience had upon you. Can you recall a time when you had a similar experience?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: "*There are Certain People*" (Chapter 28): Construct a top-10 list of the forces in your life that militate against the kind of intimate relationships the author describes.

Done\_\_\_\_\_

## Scripture Reflections

Paul to Timothy ( I Timothy 4.6-16; 6.11-16; II Timothy 2.1-7; 3.10-17)

List the various ways Paul pushes Timothy to discipline his life.

If these are disciplines that Paul wanted Timothy to develop, what does his writing suggest about the kind of person Timothy might actually have been?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Daniel: (Daniel 1, Daniel 6)

What are the things that characterize Daniel as a young man? And what can be said of him in his later maturity?

How do you see Daniel performing "under pressure"?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Mary, mother of Jesus (Luke 1,26-2.51)

What impressions do you have about Mary after you have read of her encounter with the angel?

Why do you think Mary sought out Elizabeth?

What are your observations about the friendship the two women shared?

What does Mary's "Song" tell you concerning her convictions?

When you look at all the people described in the manger scene, in what way(s) is Mary unique?

If you had to write 100 words describing Mary, what would you say?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

## Forty-Day Action Items

### Gathering Personal Intelligence

It is important to schedule a second gathering of your personal Board of Directors at the very beginning of this 20-day period. You cannot afford to lose a day if you want to keep on schedule. Keep to evaluations, not intentions.

## **Your Personal Assessment of Your Disciplines**

Using your journal as your “sounding board,” **evaluate yourself** as candidly as you can in the following areas of your life. Note categories in next section so that there is no unnecessary overlapping.

1. Your care of your body
2. Your intellectual growth
3. The qualities of your key relationships
  - a. Your marriage
  - b. Your life as a parent
  - c. Your key friendships
  - d. Your working relationships in your vocational area
  - e. Anyone who relates to you as a mentor or a “disciple”
4. Your convictions regarding the accumulation and use of money.
  - a. Your financial goals
  - b. The boundaries around your lifestyle
  - c. Your view of generosity
  - d. Any financial areas where you feel you lack discipline
5. Areas of your life where you feel you may be out of control: addictive behavior, secret temptations, etc.
6. The condition of your ego
7. The health of your emotions
  - a. What makes you angry, and how do you show anger?
  - b. Any changes in your swings of mood?
8. Your view of your income-producing work
  - a. Do you like your job?
  - b. Are you growing in your work?
  - c. Do you enjoy the respect of the people who work with you?
  - d. Where do you find weakness or deficiency in your work habits?
  - e. What difference does your faith make in the conduct of your work?
9. Your spiritual journey: Identify the three to five times in your life when you felt most “alive” in your relationship to God.
  - a. In the context of such “high” moments, how would you describe the quality of your faith at this present moment?
  - b. In what ways do you freshen your relationship to God on a regular basis?

- c. Do you find that your faith makes a significant difference in the way you are living your life?
- d. Where would you like to grow in your walk with God?
- e. Do you have a sense of an updated (or freshened) call upon your life? How would you describe it?
- f. What do you perceive as obstacles in the growth of your faith?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

## **Your Personal Community**

Using your journal as your “sounding board,” evaluate your personal relationships at this time in your life:

### **Your Marriage:**

- 1. What hopes and dreams did you bring into your marriage?
- 2. What have been the surprises (both good and bad) in your relationship with your spouse?
- 3. What are the things that make your spouse feel secure in your love?
- 4. Are there significant changes coming in the next few years that will affect your marital relationship (i.e., children leaving home, career changes, health issues)?
- 5. Are you aware of dreams and hopes that your spouse has that need your support and encouragement?
- 6. If asked, would your spouse say that he/she knows your heart?
- 7. How would you describe the quality of your mutual spiritual life?

(Done\_\_\_\_\_)

### **Your Life as a Father or Mother:**

- 1. Do your children know your life story?
- 2. What have been your goals in the raising of your children?
- 3. What have been your disappointments as a parent?
- 4. Are there traits or prevailing attitudes in the lives of any of your children that trouble you?
- 5. What has parenting taught you about yourself?
- 6. In the years that you have with your children, what are the things you desire to give them?
- 7. Is there anything you need to make right with your children?
- 8. Have you determined your convictions regarding leaving your children money when you die?

(Done\_\_\_\_\_)

### **Your Friendships:**

- 1. What persons (of the same gender) or couples would you list that—in your estimation—qualify as close friends today?
- 2. What is your definition of a “close” friendship, as opposed to other relationships?

3. Do you feel that your present *close friends* offer experiences that leave you satisfied? If not, what is missing? If so, what has led you to this conclusion?
4. What strengths and weaknesses do you think you bring to your close friendships?
5. Do you have any confidence that your contributions to the lives of your close friends make them better people?
6. After a re-reading of Chapter 28 in *A Resilient Life*, what are the names of people who fit the descriptions the author has offered as necessary among one's *happy few*? (Done\_\_\_\_)

**Your working relationships** (in your career and/or your life as a volunteer) It may be necessary to make two lists of thinking: those with whom you work in income-generation and those with whom you work in volunteer tasks (i.e., church, community activity).

1. Do you like the key people with whom you work?
2. What are the stresses that might be caused in these relationships? Can you live with them?
3. How do you see yourself as a contributor to those with whom you work?
4. Would your working associates consider you a team person?
5. Are these relationships you would be happy to continue for the foreseeable future? (Done\_\_\_\_)

## Your Vocation/Career

1. Does your work reflect your vision for life (or your sense of call)?
2. Do you feel that you are growing in your work?
3. Do you have a sense of where your present work activity is leading you? Do you care about this?
4. If your work life is a disappointment, what are the elements that make it so?
5. If you wish to make changes, what would they be and what are the things that appear to be obstacles?
6. What do you feel are your significant contributions in the area of your work?
7. How would you like to be remembered when it comes time to leave your place of work? (Done\_\_\_\_)

## General Questions

1. Reread Chapter 7 in *A Resilient Life*, and identify the questions that fit where you are today. What answers are you coming up with? Make sure your responses are in your journal.



2. Are there any major patterns of behavior or mental attitudes that need changing? What are they? What plans do you have to address them?
3. Do you have an overall financial philosophy that governs the boundaries of your lifestyle, your generosity, and your planning for future financial security?

(Done\_\_\_\_)

**By now you should have received the memo you asked your spouse or close friend to write. When you've carefully studied what's been written and you are past any emotional reactions (read them more than once, please), work through the following questions in your journal:**

- What have you learned?
- What has surprised you?
- Where does the memo challenge you?
- What are you going to do about what has been written?
- How will you respond to the memo in terms of thanks and any other kinds of reactions?

(Done\_\_\_\_)

## **Your Second Meeting with Your Board**

### **Agenda:**

- A report to the Board concerning what you have done and what you have learned during the second twenty days.
  - Your review of your disciplines,
  - Your review of your personal community,
  - Your review of your vocation/career,
  - Your "memo" experience with spouse or friend.
- Invite their questions and observations. Ask them if anything you have told them is surprising.
- Board presents and discusses memos they were asked to write at the previous meeting.
- Ask if they have any counsel to give regarding the things you have disclosed to them.
- For your final Board meeting: set your meeting date (20 days or so from now). **Ask Board members if they would write memos on their observations of your spiritual gifts and capabilities. What would be their greatest aspirations for your next ten years of life? Would each of them write out a prayer for you?**

## **Conclusions From the Second 20 Days**

Review your journal and assess your conclusions and those of your Board and begin to create some first-draft goals

1. Disciplines you will want to undertake or reaffirm,
2. Commitments you will want to make regarding your personal community,
3. Observations about your vocation or career and possible areas you may want to change or upgrade. Done\_\_\_\_\_

### **Final reflections in your journal:**

What has this period meant to you? What do you think is happening in your inner life as a result of your self-study? What do you think God might be saying to you? What are the things you now know that you didn't when this exercise began?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

# The Third Twenty Day Plan—Looking Ahead

“All my life I’ve been taught how to die, but no one ever taught me how to grow old.” (Billy Graham to his daughter, Anne Graham Lotz).

“When you get older, secondary things, like politics, begin to fall away, and the primary thing becomes primary again—and for Daddy, the primary thing is, as Jesus said, to try to love God totally, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.” (Anne Graham Lotz) *Newsweek*, August 14, 2006

## Your Reading Plan

(Record your responses in your journal)

**Gut Check on Biographical and General Reading:** How are You Doing?

Read RL: “*Resilient People Run Inspired by a Big-Picture View of life*” (Preface to Chapter 6): Unleash your imagination and create several dream-lists:

- Ten things you have always wanted to do but haven’t
- Five things you wish people said about you
- Three abilities you wish you possessed (at least to a greater extent than you possess them now)
- Five areas of knowledge you wish you could acquire
- Ten great books you would like to read
- Three hobbies that have always fascinated you
- Four areas of your Christian life in which you would like to grow
- Three to five things you would like to accomplish as contributions to your generation
- Five things you would like to do with your children before they leave home
- Five things you would like to do with your spouse before it is too late

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Have a Sense of Life-Direction*” (Chapter 6): Work through the following exercises in your journal:

- With what Biblical character do you most closely identify and why.
- Select three verses or paragraphs of Scripture (or something similar from literature or poetry) that might be possibilities for a fresh summation statement of your future life.
- Limiting yourself to 40 words, write a first draft mission statement for yourself that begins: “I want to live my life in such a way that.....”

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Foresee the Great Questions of Life’s Passage*” Chapter 7): Which set of questions comes closest to where you find yourself today? Are there questions from the previous decade and one just ahead that you find significant? Picking five of the questions most relevant to you in these three decades, work through your responses as candidly as you can in your journal.

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Cultivate Christian Character*” Chapter 8: Reflect upon the following questions and write your responses in your journal:

- Recalling the author’s comments about “continuous repentance,” make a list of those things you feel would qualify as a “frank assessment” or your shortfalls.
- Reflecting on Paul’s “fruits of the Spirit” (Galatians 5.22), pick the one where you feel you have grown the most and the one where you feel you have the most growing to do. Reflect in your journal on the reasons behind these two choices.
- Pick a person you know who exemplifies—in your opinion—the highest level of Christian character. Write a small essay in your journal about this person: why you admire them, and what there is about them that you would like to emulate.
- After you have completed your essay, invite this person to a breakfast or lunch (or some appropriate venue), tell them what you are doing, and read the essay to them. Ask them if they would be willing to share with you what they feel are the practical reasons that have led them to become as you see them to be.

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Listen for a Call From God*” Chapter 9: Can you recall a moment in your life when you felt that you had acquired a “call” from God: to do something specific, to point your life in a particular direction, to achieve a kind of capability or expertise? If you can, write the story of that experience in your journal. If you cannot identify a call as such, then write the story of the key influences in your life (people or events) that have led you to do what you are doing today.

- Do you believe that you need a call or a “freshened call” at this point in your life? If so, write out a prayer paragraph in your journal that expresses your thought to God.
- Who do you know that clearly lives their life on the basis of call? Do not assume that the only people who do this are pastors or missionaries. Invite them to join you for a breakfast or lunch (or some appropriate venue) and describe your curiosity on the subject. Ask them if they would share their experience about being called, and how the call influences their daily experiences.

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People are Confident in their Giftedness*”, Chapter 10: Review the New Testament teaching on the subject of giftedness (Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4). Seek out the stories of the following Biblical characters and speculate on what gifts they had: (Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Barnabas, Aquila and Priscilla, Elizabeth (relative of Mary), and Timothy. (Do not limit yourself to the gifts described in the New Testament; there are far more “gifts” than these.

- List five gifts you believe you have and an explanation of what has led you to these conclusions.
- Ask your “Board of directors” if each of them will make their own separate list of gifts they believe you have.
- When your list and theirs are complete, compare and contrast them and discuss them with your “board.”  
(**Note:** these last two items may have to wait until your final Board meeting.)

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read RL: “*Resilient People Live Generous Lives*” Chapter 11: In this chapter there are three issues related to generosity.

1. Generous with what one can do: What capabilities or areas of “expertise” do you possess that, if offered, could make a difference in the life of someone (or some organization) in a disadvantageous situation. Re-read the story of Al Napolitano in this chapter to gain an idea of the question).
2. Generous with what one is: What personality or character traits stand out in your life that bring benefit to others? How could you more deliberately employ them in the lives of others?
3. Generous with what one has: Write a small essay that describes your personal philosophy of finance. In other words, what are your intentions toward money: its purpose, how you make yes/no decisions in spending it, what are the limits and possibilities of life style for you and your family, your intentions in building an estate, and your current giving plan (quantities, beneficiaries). Any areas that need to be upgraded, expanded?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

## Scripture Reflections

Read: Philippians 1, Acts 22.1-21, Romans 15.17-22, I Corinthians 4, II Corinthians 4. (These readings and the following questions are an expansion of a similar exercise in the earliest of the 60 days. You might want to review what

you wrote in your journal at that time and compare/contrast what your thinking is like today.)

- Gather as much evidence as you can in these readings concerning Paul's sense of *mission* in his life.
- What price(s) do you perceive that Paul was willing to pay in order to achieve this mission? What would be the obstacles in your estimation?
- Going back to your first draft of your mission statement, see if you need to do some editing and rethinking in order to tighten it up. Review the statement with your spouse or close friend and invite their observations. Are you prepared to live in alignment with this statement?

Done\_\_\_\_\_

Read: Nehemiah 1-7.3

- Look for and note in your journal the evidences of Nehemiah's deep feelings and passions for Jerusalem. How are they expressed?
- What capabilities and points of expertise do you see Nehemiah bringing to the problem of Jerusalem?
- What impresses you about his spiritual stature?
- What kinds of opposition did he face? How did he face them down?

Read the book of Esther

- What are your observations about Mordecai and his influence upon Esther's life?
- How would you describe Esther in terms of her capabilities and points of expertise?
- What thoughts do you have about any evidence of reluctance in Esther's life? Where do you find reluctance in your life when it comes to seeking a more purposeful life?
- What kinds of opposition did she face? How did she face them down?

## Gathering Personal Intelligence

**1. Write the story of your Christian conversion** in as much detail as possible: the truths and insights, the people, the events, the obstacles that were in play as you made your choice for Christ.

- To what extent does that conversion play a role in your daily Christian thinking? Do you think about it often? Do you feel you remain true to your intentions at that time? Are there new realities in your life that the original conversion does not speak to?
- If you were to give your life to Christ for the first time at this point in your life, what would your conversion prayer sound like? Write it in your journal.
- If you were to renew your conversion to Jesus on a daily basis, what would the prayer sound like? Write it in your journal.

(Done\_\_\_\_)

**2. Write the story of your call to serve Christ.** What were the events, who were the people, what were the obstacles that led you to this initial experience?

- What place does your original sense of call have in your conscious life today?
  - Has your sense of call expanded since that first experience?
  - If you asked God for a fresh new call upon your life today, what do you think it would sound like?
- (Done\_\_\_\_)

**3. Review the material you have written about your experience, capabilities, and giftedness.** Reflect in your journal the answers to these questions:

**Your Job:**

- How many hours are you giving to your work each week (average)? In your judgment, is this number of hours in balance with the rest of your life priorities? If not, what could be done about this?
  - How satisfied are you in the work that you are doing (your income production)?
  - If appropriate, what would you prefer to be doing?
  - If appropriate, what are the obstacles that prevent you from making a change?
  - If appropriate, if the obstacles are unmovable at the present moment, when and how do you think they could be removed?
  - What kind of support do you think you need (assuming you do not have it now) to grow in what you are doing?
  - What kind of training would you like to pursue in order to increase your effectiveness?
- (Done\_\_\_\_)

**Your Life as a Volunteer:**

- How satisfying are these functions?
  - How effective do you think you are?
  - What have been the obvious results of your effort?
  - What kind of appreciation do you need, and who offers it?
  - Where are the tensions or obstacles that you face?
  - If appropriate, what would you prefer to do as an alternative?
  - What would it take to make a change?
  - What kind of training would you like to pursue in order to increase your effectiveness?
- (Done\_\_\_\_)

**4. Review the material you have compiled** as you have assessed your personal character and work through these questions:

- What have you heard your personal “directors” telling you that offers insight about their view of your character?
- What have you learned about yourself in this process that gives you a better understanding of who you are and how you come across to others.

- What areas of your personal life do you believe need to be changed? How might you go about implementing such changes. (Done\_\_\_\_)

#### 5. Your personal relationship to God:

- In what ways do you feel you have moved closer to God during this period of self-study? How has it happened? And what would it take to make it sustainable?
- What are the areas of your spiritual journey that seem the weakest? What action-items might be identified in order to bring strength to them?
- What changes do you need to make in order to upgrade your personal life of worship?
- Are there any modifications you need to make in terms of your relationship to your spouse or close friends that would enhance your spiritual journey? (Done\_\_\_\_)

## Building Your Life Plan

If at all possible, this would be an ideal time to plan a day away from all interruptions. You can experience this day by yourself in solitude and silence, or you may prefer to invite your spouse or a trusted friend to join you as you work through your life plan. Be very careful, as you make this decision, that you are free to develop your life plan without overbearing influence if you invite someone to join you. Their role is strictly one of being your companion: to engage with you in conversation, help you think through options, pray with you. But not to thrust their thoughts upon you. Ultimately, this exercise is between you and God.

Your planning document can follow any form that makes it useful to you in the future. A suggested outline might be as follows:

### My S.W.O.T. Analysis

1. **My strengths:** Where are the strong points of my character, my personality, my spiritual composition? What are my abilities and what are my spiritual gifts? What is my Myers-Briggs temperament, and what has this revealed about what I do best in my work and general relationships?
2. **My weaknesses:** Where are the areas where I am less than successful, where I need to make changes? What disciplines do I need to set in place to make necessary corrections? What does my Myers-Briggs type tell me are the places where I can most easily get into trouble? How can I either avoid those areas or find the appropriate protection?
3. **My Opportunities:** What are the possibilities for me to learn and grow in the next several years? What changes are going to occur in the near future that will enable me grow, become more effective, move ahead in some area of service?



4. **My Threats:** What has this study revealed about things that could stand in the way, even neutralize me in any area of my life? What processes will I set up to help me cope with these threats?

(Done\_\_\_\_)

**What disciplines are you prepared to set into place?** Review the discipline analysis from the previous 20-days before you set out on this exercise. Under each category, describe the three to five (more if necessary) disciplines you would like to pursue. Be careful to include reasonable measurements for each discipline. Don't set unrealistic goals; Make them clear, measurable, and achievable. Don't rush this exercise; give it time, thought, prayer.

**Physical:** how will you maintain your strength?

**Intellectual:** how do you intend to keep your mind fresh in a systematic way? (Reading, courses of study, exposure to knowledgeable people, hobbies, travel.)

**Relational:** Make a list of the 12-15 people you believe are your closest family, friends, and working associates. What specific disciplines in each of these relationships will you set in place to keep them strong and nourished?

**Emotional:** What emotional areas need discipline, and how do you intend to make that happen? Examples: anger, moodiness, gladness, impulsive reactions, fearfulness, etc.

**Work Habits:** Where are you most and least effective in doing your work? What disciplines of change need to be set in place? What needs to be sloughed off? Where do you need training, better supervision?

**Financial:** Your plans for determining the use of your money, your giving plans, retirement, estate planning decisions (what will you leave to your children?), reducing or getting out of debt; ceilings on life style.

**Ego:** What principles and disciplines will you adopt to ensure that you do not lost touch with who you really are? What will you do to maintain a spiritual perspective of humility?

**Spiritual** What are your intentions toward God? What spiritual disciplines need to be defined and systematically set in place? Your prayer life, Scripture enrichment, substantial spiritual reading, your life of worship in your church community, your

development of spiritual gifts and your commitment to volunteer service. Each of these needs appraisal and updating.

**To whom will I make myself accountable for the pursuit of these disciplines and how will I commit to such an accountability?**

**In what ways will I want to be making contributions to my generation five years from now? Ten years from now?**

**What verse of Scripture do I want to characterize my life in the future?**

**Write a prayer (a paragraph long) in which you express your fondest wishes for your future.**

(Done\_\_\_\_)

**On the basis of all this, write a vision statement for your life in 50 words or less.** Put it aside for a couple of days and see if it still reflects your sense of God's hand upon your life. When you're satisfied that it describes your fondest dreams, frame it and put it some place where you can see it often and be reminded of what you want your life to be and where you want to go.

Possible beginnings:

1. I want to live my life in such a way that.....
2. My vision for the coming five to eight years of my life is.....
3. I have committed my life to.....
4. I believe that God has called me to.....
5. My intentions for the remaining days of my life are.....

**Time to review your biographical reading:** Write an essay in your journal about your biographical choice. Following the questions asked in the attachment, how has this person marked your life?

**General reading review:** Writing an essay in your journal, discuss the impact of these books upon your thinking and sense of life direction.

**A Concluding Meeting with your Personal Board of Directors**

Schedule a meeting with your Board so that everyone can be there and enjoy a maximum amount of undistracted time for discussion. (It might be a good idea to have a dinner hosted by you and your spouse as an expression of appreciation.) It might be appropriate to consider giving each of them a small gift of appreciation.

**Agenda:**

- A review of your observations and conclusions for the final 20 days
- Invite their questions, their critique, and their suggestions. Assure them that you are looking for their judgment concerning areas where you have miscalculated.
- Invite them to read their memos concerning your spiritual giftedness.
- Review with them your plan of disciplines.
- Review with them the impact of your biographical and general reading.
- In the light of what they have heard from you and discussed among themselves, are there suggestions they would like to offer as you construct your life-plan?
- Invite them to discuss the experience they have had with you and how it has affected each of them.

## **EOE: End of Effort**

My hope is that these 60 days have marked a turning point in your life journey. You have looked backwards, forwards, and into the realities of “today.” You’ve looked in your life, into the Scriptures, and into the hearts of others who have loved you enough to tell you what they think.

What should be the results?

- You have a far better idea of the people, the events, and the ideas out of your past that have shaped you.
- You have a realistic view of who you are today, how others see you, what God may be trying to say to you.
- You have some fresh hopes and dreams about tomorrow.

You’ll know a year from now whether or not this was a worthwhile effort. If it was:

- You will have developed some new habit patterns out of your disciplines;
- You will have experienced a more satisfying spiritual life;
- You will feel more comfortable about the depth of your personal relationships;
- You will be more confident that what you call “work” in your life is making a difference.

## **Caution**

Don’t let your journaling experience die. Try to write something of your thoughts, your feelings, your discoveries every day.

Don’t stop scheduling quiet periods where you update all the aspects of your self-study. A few hours each month, put on your calendar far in advance, will suffice.

Don’t lose touch with your personal Board of Directors. Invite them to an annual reunion.

Don’t abandon your disciplines; it will be more difficult to resume them later on

Don’t ever lose your passion to be a resilient person.

## Attachments

**Your Board of Directors:** Choosing your personal directors is among the most important decisions you will make at the beginning of this effort. Bathe your choices in prayer. You might seek the counsel of your spouse or one wise and caring friend. Don't select people who are harsh or unfriendly to your interests. Preferably, your Board will be made up of people who are your age and older. They must share your faith and general convictions about life. They must be willing to deal with you in frankness.

When you ask them to participate, tell them why you have invited them. What qualities do they possess that brought them to your mind? What are your expectations? At least four meetings over 60 days. A brief assignment for most of the meetings. An agreement to pray for you.

**Your Journal:** I believe the keeping of a journal is among the most important values of such a personal exercise. For some of us, journaling comes easy; for others, it is hard. Do not allow yourself to be self-conscious when you write in your journal. You are writing for no one but yourself. Feel free to converse with yourself in writing. Don't worry about inconsistencies or speculations that might, later on, seem silly. Be yourself. Most important: Don't pull punches; don't be dishonest; don't write for posterity. If you are concerned about privacy, keep your journal in a locked box(a cheap toolbox will suffice).

For years I have kept my journal on my computer in a monthly file. At the end of the month I put everything into hard copy, and when I have approximately 150 pages, I take it all down to an office supply store and have it spiral bound. You may prefer to begin with a spiral-bound notebook and do your work in longhand. Both processes work.

Recording your thoughts in your journal—fully and freely—is the great secret in getting the most out of the *self-study*.

**Your Most Personal Relationships:** The full cooperation of your spouse or closest friends cannot be stressed enough. Invite their prayers, their suggestions, and their reactions as you make progress. Ask them to hold you accountable to your efforts.

It might be a wise thing to ask those in your most intimate circles of friends if they would gather with you at the beginning of the 60 days, lay hands on you, and pray God's blessing upon the exercise. You might invite each of them to prepare a *charge* to you as you begin this process.

Report back to them often about what you are experiencing.

**Myers-Briggs Temperament Indicator:** Most people are acquainted with the Myers-Briggs Temperament Indicator (MBTI). If you have not filled out an

indicator and had a qualified MBTI facilitator interpret the results, I would suggest that you do so as early in the *self-study* period as possible. The MBTI is not a test; not one fails or succeeds at it. It is an invaluable tool in highlighting the natural aspects of your relational skills, your work patterns, your ways of making decisions.

You will enhance the value of this exercise if your spouse (assuming you are married) also fills out the indicator. The facilitator can then help you both see where you enjoy your greatest strengths and challenges as a couple.

If you have never had exposure to an MBTI exercise, you have some wonderful surprises coming. I will say without hesitation that this was one of the most important things I ever did in terms of my work, my marriage, and my understanding of myself.

Ask around. You'll find someone rather quickly who is acquainted with the MBTI and who can help you arrange for an interview.

**Biographies:** Pick a person from the following list and make a serious study of them. Once you have settled upon a person, purchase or borrow at least two biographies of this person. Use a search engine on the internet to gather more material if possible. You want to look for the following things in your biographical project:

- The circumstances that shaped this person,
- An analysis of their character,
- Their ways of handling adversity,
- The people that made a difference in their lives (for good or ill)  
and how,
- A summary of their contributions in life,
- In what ways can you relate this person.

**Any of these would be superlative choices for a biographical study:**

- Abraham Lincoln
- Andrew Carnegie (19<sup>th</sup> century philanthropist)
- Augustine
- C.S. Lewis
- Charles Simeon (19<sup>th</sup> century Anglican pastor)
- Charles Spurgeon
- D.L. Moody
- Dorothy Day (20<sup>th</sup> Century Catholic social worker)
- Ernest Shackleton (explorer)
- Hudson Taylor (and Maria)
- John Newton
- John Wesley
- John Woolman (17<sup>th</sup> Century Quaker)
- Jonathan and Sarah Edwards
- Martin and Kate Luther

Martin Luther King  
Mary Slessor (Missionary)  
Mother Theresa  
Saint Francis of Assisi  
Saint Patrick  
William and Catherine Booth (Co-founders of the Salvation Army)  
William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect

**General Readings:** The following books would make worthwhile reading during the self-study period:

*Shantung Compound* (Langdon Gilkey)  
*Seeking the Secret Place* (Lyle Dorsett) the spiritual transformation of C.S. Lewis  
*The Life God Blesses* (Gordon MacDonald)  
*Spiritual Leadership* (Oswald Sanders)  
*My God and I* (Lewis Smedes)  
*In the Name of Jesus* (Henri Neuwen)

**The Resilient Life Study Guide:** Look for a published study guide based on the *A Resilient Life* to be released by Thomas Nelson in late 2006. The study guide bears little or no resemblance to this *self-study*. It is designed for groups of readers to get together for regular discussion or for an individual to use during the reading of *A Resilient Life*.

**Doing this Alone:** The *Self-Study* has been designed for a person to engage in a 60 day life evaluation alone. But it could be done in partnership with another person....at the most three people (my speculation). A group approach would take careful calendar planning and a commitment on the part of participants as to how deep they wished to go as they revealed their reflections. In a group, people would probably read sections of their journals to one another, tell their stories, and other exercises that the *self-study* prescribes. A serious small-group effort could have great benefits.

**A Final Word:** This entire *Self-Study* effort is an enormous undertaking. It will demand a humble spirit. And the perseverance to do the full exercise and do it with thoroughness can only come from God. I believe that God rewards the man or woman who earnestly seeks to mature in both Christian character (Christ-likeness) and effectiveness. And the goal? Not that we become happier or more successful, but rather that we become all God designed us to be for the advancement of his kingdom.

**With much thanks for Meg Scheller for editorial assistance**