

Influence
MAGAZINE

MAKE IT COUNT

An eight-week study
for leadership teams



Eight Practices to Start the New Year

STEPHEN BLANDINO

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Eight Practices to Start the New Year

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We are in a busy season of the year, and 2020 has been anything but predictable. Unexpected events have led to a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety, and many of our plans have been severely disrupted and displaced.

But 2021 is right around the corner. So, what can we do in this busy season to have a productive new year beginning Jan. 1? While there are still plenty of unknowns and uncertainties, we can prepare now to make the new year fruitful.

Resolutions are common at the start of a new year, but there are other practices that can produce transformational results. In fact, these practices can foster a greater sense of health, a sharper sense of focus, and a sustainable rhythm for the entire year.

This edition of Make It Count looks at eight practices for starting — and finishing — the new year well. With the way 2020 has shaped up, these eight practices could be crucial in 2021:

1. Rest Regularly
2. Recharge Relationally
3. Rejoice Daily
4. Renew Spiritually
5. Reflect Carefully
6. Refocus Purposefully
7. Remove Deliberately
8. Reprioritize Strategically

WHAT IS MAKE IT COUNT?

Week after week, you invest time and energy into making every Sunday count. But you also have to think about staff meetings, board meetings, and meetings with key volunteers and other church leaders.

Juggling so many meetings can seem overwhelming, especially as you think about developing the leaders around you. Effective leaders are continually looking for great leadership content they can use to develop and mentor other leaders. Make It Count is a powerful, little tool to help you accomplish just that.

Each Make It Count lesson is easily adaptable for individual or group discussion, allowing for personal application and reflection among your ministry leaders

and lead volunteers. The lessons are useful as devotionals in board and staff meetings and in departmental meetings with your lead volunteers.

Studying and growing together is an important practice of building strong, healthy relationships with your team members. It is also a necessary component of building healthy, flourishing churches. These lessons can help you make each moment count as you lead and develop the leaders around you.

The following eight, easy-to-use lessons on practices for starting the new year are written by Stephen Blandino,



Blandino



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By preparing for a new year with these eight practices, leaders will lay a great foundation to start and finish strong. Not only will you gain extraordinary focus, but you'll establish habits for living and leading from a healthier posture.

Each lesson offers biblical perspective and practical application so you can make the new year count. Furthermore, as you discuss the lessons with your team, each team member will become more focused and intentional on a personal, departmental and organizational level.

lead pastor of 7 City Church (AG) in Fort Worth, Texas (7citychurch.com). He planted 7 City Church in 2012 in a thriving cultural arts district near downtown Fort Worth. Blandino blogs regularly at stephenblandino.com and is the author of several books, including *Do Good Works*, *Creating Your Church's Culture*, and *GO! Starting a Personal Growth Revolution*.

HOW TO USE MAKE IT COUNT

We are pleased to offer the *Make It Count Discussion Guide* in a downloadable PDF, available through the "Downloads" button on Influencemagazine.com. Each lesson in the PDF *Make It Count Discussion Guide* is divided into a *Leader's* page and *Team Member's* page.

The *Leader's* page corresponds directly to the material in this print issue of the magazine.

We encourage you to print multiple copies of the PDF *Discussion Guide* from Influencemagazine.com for all your ministry leaders and the team members they lead in your church or organization.

You will notice that key words and concepts are underlined in each lesson on the *Leader's* page. These underlined words and phrases correspond to the blank spaces found on the team member lesson pages. Team members can fill in the blanks as you progress through each lesson's material.

We trust these lessons will help you make each moment count as you lead and develop the leaders around you.

Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Rest Regularly

Assess: What are your biggest challenges to getting adequate rest as a leader?

Insights and Ideas

Marathoners experience the greatest temptation to call it quits at the 20- to 21-mile mark. That's the point when they usually hit the wall emotionally. They're exhausted, and the finish line is nowhere in sight. Leaders experience a similar feeling during hectic seasons with high demands.

For pastors, one of those times can be a fast-paced Christmas season, with lots of activities and stressful schedules. Plus, with so many unforeseen events in 2020, the entire year has come with waves of physical exhaustion, mental fatigue, and emotional weariness. By the time the new year rolls around, it should be clear that our pace needs adjusting.

Jesus described the starting place for a healthier pace when He said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

You may feel weary and burdened right now, but rest can change everything for you. Rest produces two benefits that are especially impactful.

1. *Rest refreshes the soul.* Jesus said "you will find rest for your souls." When we choose to pull back, lean into the Lord, and rest, we make space for our souls to breathe. Leadership has a way of constricting our time, energy and emotional resources, but rest gives us breathing room so our souls can expand with God's peace and strength.
2. *Rest recalibrates your pace.* Your pace can fall into two categories: could do and should do. Your "could do" pace is how fast you can run — but just because you *can* doesn't meet you *should*. Your "should do" pace is the sustainable rhythm that allows you to find the rest necessary to finish well. You have to focus on the pace you *should* do, not what you could do. When you intentionally rest, you create a sustainable pace, one that maintains adequate reserves for the last few miles of the race.

While we often think of the new year as a time to ramp up, you may need to start by slowing things down. Resist the urge to load up the calendar with lots of new activities. Take time to slow down mentally, emotionally and physically. Recalibrate your pace. Embrace the practice of rest. You'll discover a greater sense of peace, and your mind will be clear so you can leverage the other seven practices as you start the new year.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Why does our culture find it so hard to practice regular rest?
2. When and how do you experience the greatest amount of rest as a leader?
3. What would it look like to create a more sustainable pace and pattern of rest this year?

Apply

Take a moment to reflect on your pace in 2020. When did you find yourself the least rested and the most rested? What are two or three things you could change to make space for adequate rest in the new year?

Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Rest Regularly

Assess: What are your biggest challenges to getting adequate rest as a leader?

Marathoners experience the greatest temptation to call it quits at the 20- to 21-mile mark. That's the point when they usually hit the wall emotionally. They're exhausted, and the finish line is nowhere in sight. Leaders experience a similar feeling during hectic seasons with high demands.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Two benefits of rest:

1. *Rest refreshes the* _____. Leadership has a way of constricting our time, energy and emotional resources, but rest gives us breathing room so our souls can expand with God's peace and strength.
2. *Rest recalibrates your* _____. Your pace can fall into two categories: _____ and _____.

When you intentionally rest, you create a sustainable pace, one that maintains adequate reserves for the last few miles of the race.

Embrace the practice of rest. You'll discover a greater sense of peace, and your mind will be clear so you can leverage the other seven practices as you start the new year.

Apply

Take a moment to reflect on your pace in 2020. When did you find yourself the least rested and the most rested? What are two or three things you could change to make space for adequate rest in the new year?

Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Recharge Relationally

Team Review: What adjustments will you make to leave room for rest in the new year?

Assess: In what ways have you found relationships helpful for recharging your life?

Insights and Ideas

Leaders have a tendency to retract into isolation as the demands of leadership increase. When our pace increases, our connectivity decreases. In other words, community is often the casualty of a chaotic schedule. The very thing that recharges us often becomes unplugged from our lives.

Scripture makes clear the value of relationships. Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 says, “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.” And 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” Both passages show the beauty and benefit of relationships.

To start the new year right, practice recharging relationally. None of us are good enough to do life alone. Here are two steps to get you started:

1. *Form a life team.* Author John Townsend challenges leaders to form a “life team” that will provide a healthy dose of relational nutrients. A life team is a small group of 3 to 10 people with whom you meet with regularly for mutual support and growth. These relationships provide important relational nutrients, such as acceptance, comfort, affirmation, respect, encouragement, forgiveness, celebration, perspective, insight, feedback, advice and accountability. Townsend says members of a life team need to have chemistry with one another and be vulnerable, honest, and able to challenge one another.
2. *Schedule relational time.* The idea of scheduling relational time may seem a bit cold, but that’s exactly what most leaders need to do. Think about it this way: Schedule blocks of time where relationships can thrive, and then make what you do in those blocks of time meaningful, purposeful and even spontaneous. Creativity can still thrive in the context of structure. Structure keeps relationships in focus; what you do within that structure keeps relationships fulfilling.

The practice of recharging relationally will make a huge difference in the new year. But, as with anything important, this doesn’t happen accidentally. You need a team, and you need a time. The team is the *whom*, and the time is the *when*. The team provides the nutrients, and the time ensures regular delivery of those nutrients.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What have you found to be the most beneficial way to make room for relationships in your life?
2. What are the greatest benefits you experience personally when engaging in meaningful relationships?
3. How does the idea of forming a life team challenge you? What, if anything, do you not like about the idea of a life team?

Apply

Put together a list of people who could be on your life team. What family members, friends or mentors would be on your list? Then, take steps to intentionally form this team and engage with members regularly. To recharge at a deeper level relationally, consider reading *People Fuel* by John Townsend.

Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Recharge Relationally

Assess: In what ways have you found relationships helpful for recharging your life?

Leaders have a tendency to retract into isolation as the demands of leadership increase. When our pace increases, our connectivity decreases. In other words, community is often the casualty of a chaotic schedule. The very thing that recharges us often becomes unplugged from our lives.

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up” (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10).

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Two steps to recharging relationally:

1. *Form a _____ team.* A life team is a small group of three to 10 people with whom you meet with regularly for mutual support and growth. John Townsend says members of a life team need to have chemistry with one another and be vulnerable, honest, and able to challenge one another.
2. *Schedule _____ time.* Schedule blocks of time where relationships can thrive, and then make what you do in those blocks of time meaningful, purposeful and even spontaneous.

Apply

Put together a list of people who could be on your life team. What family members, friends or mentors would be on your list? Then, take steps to intentionally form this team and engage with members regularly. To recharge at a deeper level relationally, consider reading *People Fuel* by John Townsend.

Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Rejoice Daily

Team Review: What progress have you made toward putting together a life team?

Assess: On a scale from 1 to 10, how well do you practice expressing gratitude to God and others?

Insights and Ideas

It's easy for leaders to focus so much on where they're going they don't stop to express gratitude for where they've been. In fact, because leaders can usually see the gaps in a service, product or system, they may come across as chronically critical or discontented. That's especially true when they fail to thank God and others.

Thanksgiving should be a lifestyle for Christians. The apostle Paul said to "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). The practice of rejoicing daily helps us enter a new year with a new mindset. How do we develop this attitude of gratitude?

1. *Reframe your perspective.* In life, we tend to translate "good" to mean "easy," and "hard" to mean "bad." In other words, we see whatever makes life easier as good, and whatever makes life harder as bad. The problem is, we assume that's God's perspective as well. It's not. God's "good" looks different than ours because He sees it through the lens of our growth. And the things that help us grow the most are rarely the things that are easy. The question is, can you be thankful for the good that helps you grow — even when it's hard? A life of gratitude starts with a deliberate decision to reframe life with a different perspective.
2. *Start a gratitude journal.* If we're going to rejoice frequently, most of us need a system for doing so. Why not start the year with a 30-day gratitude journal? Write down two things each day for which you're grateful. You might even make this a practice you engage with family or a friend, perhaps over a meal or a phone call.
3. *Regularly worship the Lord.* Psalm 25:14 says, "The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them." Worship reminds us of God's goodness and helps us develop a sweet, satisfying companionship with Him. Choose to start the new year by rejoicing daily. Celebrate wins, focus on God's faithfulness, and actively express an attitude of gratitude.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What are two things you are thankful for right now?
2. Why do we have a natural tendency to equate "hard" with "bad," and "easy" with "good"?
3. What would it look like for you to "rejoice daily" in the new year?

Apply

Make a decision to start a gratitude journal for the first month of the new year. Whether you use a paper journal or a digital device, write down two things you are grateful for each day. At the end of the month, reflect on your journey, how it has changed your thinking, and the potential benefits of continuing this practice.

Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Rejoice Daily

Assess: On a scale from 1 to 10, how well do you practice expressing gratitude to God and others?

It's easy for leaders to focus so much on where they're going they don't stop to express gratitude for where they've been.

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

How to develop an attitude of gratitude:

1. *Reframe your* _____. In life, we tend to translate "good" to mean "easy," and "hard" to mean "bad." In other words, we see whatever makes life easier as good, and whatever makes life harder as bad. A life of gratitude starts with a deliberate decision to reframe life with a different perspective.
2. *Start a* _____ *journal.* Write down two things each day for which you're grateful. You might even make this a practice you engage with family or a friend, perhaps over a meal or a phone call.
3. *Regularly* _____ *the Lord.*

"The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them" (Psalm 25:14).

Apply

Make a decision to start a gratitude journal for the first month of the new year. Whether you use a paper journal or a digital device, write down two things you are grateful for each day. At the end of the month, reflect on your journey, how it has changed your thinking, and the potential benefits of continuing this practice.

Study
4

Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Renew Spiritually

Team Review: What difference can daily gratitude make in your life?

Assess: How do you most enjoy connecting with God?

Insights and Ideas

Regular spiritual renewal is one of the most important practices for starting the new year right. Jesus said, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

Seeking first means making it a single-minded priority — a first and foremost habit — to pursue a life fully submitted to Christ’s rule and authority, and to conform to His standard of character and holiness. Our calling is to put God first, and then trust Him to provide the things He knows we need.

Jesus modeled spiritual renewal on a regular basis. Luke 5:16 says, “Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” From Jesus’ example, we discover three keys to spiritual renewal:

1. *Frequency.* Prayer was something Jesus did “often.” This implies a habit. John 6:15 says, “Jesus ... withdrew *again* to a mountain by himself” (emphasis added). Jesus didn’t restrict prayer to temple visits or mealtimes. Prayer was a frequent practice that shaped His life and leadership.
2. *Privacy.* Luke 5:16 also reveals Jesus “withdrew” for prayer. This word implies privacy and seclusion. Jesus sought a place for prayer away from the crowds and the distractions. Luke 9:18 says Jesus prayed in private with His disciples. In John 6:15, Jesus withdrew “by himself.” Jesus withdrew from the noise to be with His Father and hear from His Father. We need to do the same. Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” It’s in the stillness that you experience His presence.
3. *Vicinity.* Finally, Jesus had a place for prayer. Luke 5:16 indicates He prayed in the wilderness. In Matthew 14:13 and Mark 1:35, Jesus went to a “solitary place.” Jesus’ private habit of prayer was formed in a private place of prayer. Spiritual renewal requires a *place* and a *pace*. The place provides privacy, and the pace cultivates intimacy. When combined, we experience a deeper relationship with our Heavenly Father. What would happen if your greatest goal in the new year wasn’t to *advance*, but rather to *withdraw*?

Reflect and Discuss

1. When was a time you felt most refreshed in your relationship with God?
2. How do you typically experience your greatest times of spiritual renewal?
3. Which of the three keys to spiritual renewal — frequency, privacy, or vicinity — is your greatest strength, and which is your biggest challenge?

Apply

Reflect on Jesus’ pattern for experiencing spiritual renewal. What might frequency, privacy and vicinity look like for you? Test them over the next couple of weeks until you find a pace and place that works for you. Then, make this your practice in the new year.

Study
4
TEAM GUIDE

Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Renew Spiritually

Assess: How do you most enjoy connecting with God?

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

“Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16).

Three keys to spiritual renewal:

1. _____. Prayer was something Jesus did “often.” Prayer was a frequent practice that shaped His life and leadership.

“Jesus ... withdrew *again* to a mountain by himself” (John 6:15, emphasis added).

2. _____. Jesus “withdrew” for prayer. This word implies privacy and seclusion.

“Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him” (Luke 9:18).

“Jesus ... withdrew again to a mountain by himself” (John 6:15).

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth” (Psalm 46:10).

3. _____. Jesus had a place for prayer. Luke 5:16 indicates He prayed in the wilderness.

“Jesus ... withdrew by boat privately to a *solitary place*” (Matthew 14:13, emphasis added).

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a *solitary place*, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35, emphasis added).

Spiritual renewal requires a _____ and a _____. The place provides privacy, and the pace cultivates intimacy.

Apply

Reflect on Jesus’ pattern for experiencing spiritual renewal. What might frequency, privacy and vicinity look like for you? Test them over the next couple of weeks until you find a pace and place that works for you. Then, make this your practice in the new year.

Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Reflect Carefully

Team Review: How have the three keys to spiritual renewal — frequency, privacy and vicinity — worked for you?

Assess: Does personal reflection come naturally for you? Why or why not?

Insights and Ideas

Author and pastor Andy Stanley says, “Experience doesn’t make you wiser. Evaluated experience makes you wiser.”

It’s when we intentionally put our lives under the microscope that we discover the insights that help us make better decisions and develop better habits. The apostle Paul encouraged this evaluation process when he said, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you — unless, of course, you fail the test?” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Preparing for a new year with the practice of careful reflection will give you the perspective you need before moving forward. Too often we do what we’ve always done without taking time to evaluate whether it’s actually working. As a result, we spend our time putting out fires, reacting to the urgent, and letting others dictate our use of time. Next year can be different, but it starts with reflecting on the current year and asking yourself four questions:

1. *What lessons have I learned?* Begin by mining for lessons you’ve gleaned over this year. Lessons often emerge when we observe patterns that have developed over a period of several weeks or months.
2. *How have I invested my time over the past year?* When you go day-by-day through your entire calendar, you can quickly discover how you’ve invested your time. This exercise reveals time wasters, time drainers, and poor time management practices. Once you’ve gained a clear picture of reality, you can ask the third question.
3. *What will give me the greatest return on my investment of time in the new year?* Author John Maxwell says success is determined by your daily agenda. After identifying what has filled your daily agenda over the previous year, determine what changes you need to make in the new year. To get the greatest return on your investment of time, you must determine what to stop, start or delegate while remaining true to your gifts, passions and highest priorities.
4. *What changes do I need to make?* Careful reflection of our lives will bring to the surface specific changes we need to make. Those changes may have to do with the use of our time, talent or treasure, and they may be changes in how we lead.

Reflecting carefully will yield dynamic insights we can leverage for the future. Without reflection, we live in a constant state of reactionary panic.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Do you have a regular practice of reflection in your life? If so, what does that process look like?
2. Which of the four reflection questions most challenge you? Why?
3. What can we do to practice reflection on an organizational level?

Apply

Carve out some time this week to review your calendar, and then ask yourself the four questions above. Next, align the new year’s calendar with the changes you need to make and the adjustments that will yield the greatest return on your investment of time.

Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Reflect Carefully

Assess: Does personal reflection come naturally for you? Why or why not?

“Experience doesn’t make you wiser. Evaluated experience makes you wiser.” — Andy Stanley

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you — unless, of course, you fail the test?” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Four questions for reflecting on the past year:

1. *What _____ have I learned?* Lessons often emerge when we observe patterns that have developed over a period of several weeks or months.
2. *How have I _____ my time over the past year?* When you go day-by-day through your entire calendar, you can quickly discover how you’ve invested your time.
3. *What will give me the greatest _____ on my investment of time in the new year?* Author John Maxwell says success is determined by your daily agenda.
4. *What _____ do I need to make?* Careful reflection of our lives will bring to the surface specific changes we need to make.

Apply

Carve out some time this week to review your calendar, and then ask yourself the four questions above. Next, align the new year’s calendar with the changes you need to make and the adjustments that will yield the greatest return on your investment of time.

Study 6

Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Refocus Purposefully

Team Review: What did you learn or change after reviewing your calendar?

Assess: How clear are you on your personal purpose and core values?

Insights and Ideas

Because leaders often feel pulled in multiple directions, it's essential to have a strong compass that points you in the right direction. The apostle Paul said, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

If you don't understand the "good works" God has called you to pursue, you'll invest your time throughout the new year doing things that simply may not matter. To help you refocus, consider four points to the purpose compass:

1. *Life mission.* What is the life mission to which God has called you? This may be expressed in three ways: what God has called you to do (gifts, abilities and skills); whom God has called you to serve (a specific audience or group); and the outcome God wants to produce through your life (the result of using your gifts, abilities and skills). Clarifying your life mission will enable you to strategically align the resources of your life with God's purpose for your life.
2. *Core values.* What principles, priorities or people are most important to you? The answer to this question defines your core values. Those principles, priorities and people could be God, family, integrity, hard work, leadership development, excellence, etc. Identify your values, and then narrow that list to between five and seven.
3. *Personal legacy.* What is the ultimate legacy you want to leave behind? If you want to leave a legacy worth remembering when you die, you have to write a legacy worth recording while you're alive. You write your legacy by focusing on three things: your character (who you are), your connections (whom you've impacted), and your contributions (what you've done). By focusing on these three areas now, you can be intentional about writing a legacy that counts.
4. *Life Scriptures.* Identify one or more Scriptures that capture the essence of your life. A life Scripture is usually a verse God has used to shape or support you. In other words, it's a verse God used to shape you into the person you are today, or to support you during a deep valley. Are you living your life according to these life-shaping truths? Are you expanding your pursuit of Scripture to become more like Jesus?

When you refocus on these four points of your purpose compass, you'll be more likely to align your new year to what matters most.

Reflect and Discuss

1. On which of the four points of the compass do you have the greatest clarity and the least clarity?
2. What are some of your core values?
3. What kinds of character, connections and contributions do you want to be a part of your legacy?

Apply

Take time to identify the four points of your purpose compass. This may take a few days — or weeks — but the impact could shape the rest of your life. The greater clarity you have, the more equipped you'll be to purposefully refocus your time on what matters most in the new year.

Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Refocus Purposefully

Assess: How clear are you on your personal purpose and core values?

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

Four points to the purpose compass:

1. *Life* _____. What is the life mission to which God has called you? This may be expressed in three ways: what God has called you to _____ (gifts, abilities and skills); whom God has called you to _____ (a specific audience or group); and the _____ God wants to produce through your life (the result of using your gifts, abilities and skills).
2. *Core* _____. What principles, priorities or people are most important to you?
3. *Personal* _____. What is the ultimate legacy you want to leave behind? You write your legacy by focusing on three things: your _____ (who you are), your _____ (whom you’ve impacted), and your _____ (what you’ve done).
4. *Life* _____. Identify one or more Scriptures that capture the essence of your life. A life Scripture is usually a verse God has used to shape or support you.

Apply

Take time to identify the four points of your purpose compass. This may take a few days — or weeks — but the impact could shape the rest of your life. The greater clarity you have, the more equipped you’ll be to purposefully refocus your time on what matters most in the new year.



Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Remove Deliberately

Team Review: What steps have you taken to identify your life mission, core values, personal legacy and life Scriptures?

Assess: What things tend to clutter your life and schedule the most?

Insights and Ideas

As leadership responsibilities increase, life becomes increasingly complex. The truth is, the fight to simplify seems to intensify the longer we lead.

At some point, we have to shed everything that gets in the way of what's most important. Hebrews 12:1 says, "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us *throw off everything that hinders* and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (emphasis added).

This principle of overcoming hindrances applies to leadership as well. Not only must we throw off the sin that hinders and entangles, but we must also deliberately remove the clutter that gets in the way of doing what God has called us to do. Leaders should deliberately "throw off" three forms of clutter:

1. *Throw off calendar clutter.* How many times do we clutter our calendars with things that simply add no value to our lives, or anyone else's life? Calendar clutter often shows up as poor time management skills, saying "yes" to meetings that don't matter, or adding tasks to your to-do-list that have little return on the time required to do them. A big part of decluttering our calendar is clarifying our highest priorities. When priorities are clear, the clutter starts to stand out like a sore thumb.
2. *Throw off digital clutter.* Digital clutter includes everything from email and apps to social media. If you want to remove the digital clutter, unsubscribe from emails that clutter your inbox. Put limits on apps that consume too much time. Deliberately cut down on the endless social media scrolling. Limit the constant consumption of gaming and entertainment. Digital clutter is robbing our peace and bombarding our lives with distractions.
3. *Throw off relational clutter.* Relationships become clutter when they are dysfunctional, consume inordinate amounts of time, or violate healthy boundaries. You have to clarify your relationships and then prioritize those relationships. In some cases, you may even need to separate yourself from relationships that negatively impact your life.

The practice of deliberately removing the clutter from your life tends to be emotional. When you become used to the clutter, the clutter often becomes your default. But when you deliberately declutter your life, you start to experience a greater measure of God's peace.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Which of the three forms of clutter is your biggest challenge? Why?
2. How much time do you believe would be freed up by removing the calendar, digital and relational clutter from your life?
3. What is a deliberate step you could take today toward decluttering?

Apply

Do a clutter audit on your calendar, use of digital tools, and relationships. Identify the things that are consuming too much of your time and the people who are draining your emotional energy. Develop a strategy to declutter and create boundaries and accountability that will foster greater health.

Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Remove Deliberately

Assess: What things tend to clutter your life and schedule the most?

“Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us *throw off everything that hinders* and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1, emphasis added).

Removing three forms of clutter:

1. *Throw off* _____ *clutter*. This often shows up as poor time management skills, saying “yes” to meetings that don’t matter, or adding tasks to your to-do-list that have little return on the time required to do them.
2. *Throw off* _____ *clutter*. This includes everything from email and apps to social media.
3. *Throw off* _____ *clutter*. These become clutter when they are dysfunctional, consume inordinate amounts of time, or violate healthy boundaries.

The practice of deliberately removing the clutter from your life tends to be emotional. When you become used to the clutter, the clutter often becomes your default. But when you deliberately declutter your life, you start to experience a greater measure of God’s peace.

Apply

Do a clutter audit on your calendar, use of digital tools, and relationships. Identify the things that are consuming too much of your time and the people who are draining your emotional energy. Develop a strategy to declutter and create boundaries and accountability that will foster greater health.



Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Reprioritize Strategically

Team Review: What have you done in the last week to declutter your life?

Assess: What steps do you take each day, week or year to strategically reprioritize your life?

Insights and Ideas

The apostle Paul had an unwavering goal to know Christ. He said, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12–14).

What gave Paul’s goal so much power was that it became his singular focus. Nothing distracted him. He did this “one thing,” and Paul forgot everything behind him as he moved toward his highest priority. That same power of focus is essential if we want to make the new year count. When we embrace the previous seven practices, we gain the clarity and focus necessary to strategically reprioritize the future. As leaders, this strategic reprioritization should happen in four areas:

1. *Strategically reprioritize your personal growth.* One way to reprioritize personal growth is to create a plan. A good plan for personal growth will answer four questions: In what areas do I want to grow? How do I plan to grow? Who will hold me accountable to grow? When and how will I evaluate my growth progress? Following this process with three or four growth goals will make a significant impact over the next year.
2. *Strategically reprioritize your family health.* Family time is often lost in the busyness of leadership. To strategically reprioritize your family in the new year, sit down with your family members to develop a plan that works for everyone. Making this a family effort gives each person a voice and helps everybody make it a priority.
3. *Strategically reprioritize your team’s growth.* How intentional are you about growing the members of your team? You can strategically reprioritize your team’s growth by attending conferences together, reading and discussing books, listening to podcasts, providing practical training, and even viewing leadership courses or webinars together. The key is to map out a clear and concise developmental plan for the next year.
4. *Strategically reprioritize your organizational goals.* What are the most important three or four goals your organization should pursue in the next 6 to 12 months? When you clarify your goals, you can strategically reprioritize your resources around those goals.

Reflect and Discuss

1. In what way do the apostle Paul’s words in Philippians 3:12–14 challenge you?
2. Which of the four areas of reprioritization needs the most attention from you right now? Why?
3. Pick one of the four reprioritization areas. What might it look like to strategically reprioritize that area over the next year?

Apply

Put together an appropriate team to develop a clear and practical strategy for this year in each of the four reprioritization areas. Then, put the strategy in writing, create a timeline, delegate responsibilities, and monitor progress.

Eight Practices to Start the New Year

Reprioritize Strategically

Assess: What steps do you take each day, week or year to strategically reprioritize your life?

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12–14).

Four areas of strategic reprioritization:

1. *Strategically reprioritize your _____ growth.*

Answer four questions: In what areas do I want to grow? How do I plan to grow? Who will hold me accountable to grow? When and how will I evaluate my growth progress?

2. *Strategically reprioritize your _____ health.*

Family time is often lost in the busyness of leadership.

3. *Strategically reprioritize your _____ growth.*

Map out a clear and concise developmental plan for the next year.

4. *Strategically reprioritize your _____ goals.*

What are the most important three or four goals your organization should pursue in the next six to 12 months?

Apply

Put together an appropriate team to develop a clear and practical strategy for this year in each of the four reprioritization areas. Then, put the strategy in writing, create a timeline, delegate responsibilities, and monitor progress.