

Establishing a Spiritual Growth Plan

What dimensions of life should a spiritual growth plan address?

A spiritual growth plan ultimately should address all the major dimensions of life in which we need to grow in health and holiness. These include the following:

- (1) Worship: Growing in connecting with God
- (2) Mind: Growing in our knowledge and understanding of God
- (3) Body: Growing in physical health and sexual purity
- (4) Heart: Growth in maturity of character and emotional health
- (5) Relationships: Growing in connecting with others
- (6) Work and Service: Growing in using our gifts, talents, and skills to serve others
- (7) Wealth: Growing in using material resources for God's kingdom mission

How do I write a personal spiritual growth plan?

Seeing where we are

Before writing a spiritual growth plan, we need some preparation. Before we can identify our needs and goals for spiritual growth, we must first understand God's standards for our lives and also notice and evaluate our current way of life in light of God's standards.

For each dimension of our life, we need to ask the following:

- How should I follow Christ?

We must identify from Scripture God's primary purpose and standards for our lives.

- How am I currently following Christ?

We must identify the particular rhythms and habits that we already practice (however imperfectly) in following Christ and obeying God's standards.

- How am I failing to follow Christ?

We must identify aspects of our life that are sinful, unwise, and/or unhealthy so that we can recognize ways that we need to change.

Seeing how we need to grow

When we have studied and applied God's word to our lives, we are prepared to imagine new ways of life that are more faithful to God's purpose and standards for our lives. In all seven dimensions of life, we must envision new attitudes and behaviors that align our lives more faithfully to God's word and challenge our particular sins and weaknesses. Our spiritual growth plan helps guide our growth by naming new ideals and concrete changes we must make in our practices of life that lead us to greater repentance, holiness, health, and Christ-likeness.

What would it look like to combine these steps in preparing a spiritual growth plan? There is no single “right” way to do this. Here is one method that you could try to organize your thoughts. Select one of the seven dimensions of life, and write down answers in the following categories:

(1) I should . . .

What are God’s primary instructions and standards for this dimension of life? What biblical principles, values, and practices should I strive to embody in this dimension of my life?

(2) I am . . .

How am I currently doing in this dimension of life? What are the particular rhythms and habits that I am practicing at the present time in this dimension of life?

(3) I am not . . .

What are some ways that I am disobeying God’s word and falling short of God’s purpose in this dimension of life? In what ways are my current practices sinful, unwise, and/or unhealthy in this dimension of life?

(4) I will . . .

What specific, concrete, measurable, and achievable goals will I commit to pursue at this time in order to push back against my sins and weaknesses and become more like Christ? What specific new behaviors and practices will help me cultivate greater love for God and obedience to God in this dimension of life?

Here is an example of how one person’s responses might look for the “Worship” dimension:

(1) I should . . .

I should love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength.

I should gather with my church every week for public worship.

I should pray privately every day.

I should regularly pray all the major kinds of prayer (praise/thanks, confession, lament, petition).

I should model my own prayers on biblical prayers.

I should pray regularly for all the people who are closest to me, for the ministry of the church, and for people and situations where God’s work is clearly needed.

(2) I am . . .

I am worshipping with my congregation 2-3 times per month.

I pray privately, but sometimes I go many days (weeks?) in a row without setting aside any focused time with God.

I sometimes ask God for things I need, but I don’t confess my sins to God very regularly, and I don’t know what lament really looks like.

I sometimes pray for my family and friends when I think of big needs they have, but I don’t have any system to remind me to pray regularly for the most important people in my life.

(3) I am not . . .

I am not valuing public worship as highly as I should.

I am not engaging in prayer with enough regularity each day to help me cultivate a close relationship with God in the midst of my daily life.

I am not praying from the Bible and allowing God's word to guide my prayers.

I am not praying with enough regularity for important people and needs in my life and the lives of others.

(4) I will . . .

My initial goals:

I will attend public worship every week.

I will set aside 15-20 minutes in the morning to pray before I start work using a psalm or Scripture reading from my church's daily prayer guide.

After I have started forming a new habit in my first two goals, I will pursue these goals:

I will set aside 15-20 minutes in the evening to pray, with a few minutes to examine my day with the Lord.

I will make a list of people for whom I need to pray regularly and organize a system on a phone app to keep these needs in front of me through the day.

4. Some wise guidelines and tips for your spiritual growth plan

(1) Give yourself time to develop a spiritual growth plan.

It takes time to notice what you are currently doing, to assess your needs for growth, and to set good goals for growth. Consider scheduling some regular blocks of time over a period of a few weeks to get started. Or, if possible, schedule one or more half-days or whole days for a personal retreat to begin doing this work. This is important work, so put it on your calendar just like you would other important events.

You don't have to work through all seven dimensions before getting started. It is probably best and most achievable for you to develop your spiritual growth plan over time. Assess your needs in one area and start working toward some goals in that area, and then turn toward other areas one at a time.

(2) Start with worship.

Worship is the foundation of all personal growth because apart from abiding in Christ we can do nothing (John 15:1-11). Since we can only grow by the power of God's Holy Spirit, we need to develop habits of worship in which we constantly turn our minds and hearts to God to know him and cry out to him for the grace and power we desperately need. This will help prevent us from conceiving and experiencing our pursuit of spiritual growth in other dimensions of life as a legalistic project of self-help by our own strength and strategies alone. So start with specific practices of Bible-based meditation and prayer in weekly public worship and daily private worship.

(3) Prioritize other dimensions of life according to their importance and impact.

After you have started making some progress in your practices of worship, try to discern which other dimensions of life have the most urgent needs for growth. For example, if you are so constantly physically exhausted that you can't even imagine pursuing plans to grow in your relationships or your work, you should probably focus first on your body and develop habits of resting, eating, and exercising so that you will have sufficient energy for the rest of your life. Or if you have an important relationship that is in crisis, you might focus first on seeking ways to reconcile and restore that relationship.

However, there is a certain logic in following this progression:

Knowing and loving God (Worship)



Knowing and Loving Self (Mind, Body, Heart)



Knowing and Loving Others (Relationships, Work & Service, Wealth)

The dimension of "Mind" includes growing in one's knowledge of the Bible, Christian theology/doctrines, and reasons to believe. This knowledge provides a vital foundation for the work of applying and living according to the word of God in the other dimensions of our lives. Also, knowing oneself and pursuing transformation of one's mind, body, and heart will have positive impact on one's relationships with others and service in the world. Conversely, seeking transformation of external relationships and service can be more difficult without first giving attention to one's internal life.

But your specific needs might require more immediate attention to a particular area, so this recommended order is only a general suggestion. And, of course, all the dimensions are inter-connected, so change in any one of them will have an impact on all of the others in some way.

(4) Write good goals.

Good goals are:

- Specific and measurable
- Stretching/challenging
- Attainable/reasonable
- Few in number: Growth is incremental. You can't change many things all at one time.
- Evaluated regularly

(5) Start slow and increase gradually.

Christian growth is a marathon, not a sprint, and starting a spiritual growth plan is like starting to train for a marathon. Start with goals that are very achievable so that you get the positive reinforcement of accomplishing them and build a new habit/rhythms through regularity.

(6) Plan regular times to re-evaluate.

A spiritual growth plan is a living document that needs to change regularly as you grow. You will learn by doing. You might realize that some goals are not (yet) reasonable for this season of life or that you attempted too much change. Or your circumstances might change in ways that require focus on a new issue.

(7) Form a growth group to share and walk with others.

Spiritual growth is not an individual self-help project. We need friends to walk with us for support and challenge. Find a group of 1-3 other close friends and ask them to meet regularly so that each of you develop a personal spiritual growth plan and share your self-reflection and goals with each other. Meet often enough to share the ups and downs of pursuing the Lord, and support each other with frequent encouragement and prayer to help one another grow. It helps greatly to know that we are not walking alone!