

WIN THE DAY

7 Steps to Setting Life Goals

Mark Batterson

On a rainy morning in 1940, a teenager named John Goddard pulled out a piece of paper and wrote down 127 life goals. By the time he turned fifty, Goddard had accomplished 108 of those 127 goals. And these were no garden variety goals! Here's a sampling:

Milk a poisonous snake

Learn Jujitsu

Study primitive culture in Borneo

Run a mile in five minutes

Retrace the travels of Marco Polo and Alexander the Great

Photograph Victoria Falls in Rhodesia

Build a telescope

Read the Bible from cover to cover

Circumnavigate the globe

Publish an article in National Geographic magazine

Play the flute and violin

Learn French, Spanish, and Arabic

Honestly, I would have counted French, Spanish and Arabic as three separate goals. And I would have considered the flute and violin as two goals, but that's me. My favorite Goddard goal? *Visit the moon*. Goddard set that goal long before *Sputnik* escaped the earth's atmosphere or the *Eagle* landed on Tranquility Base. That's aiming for the stars, literally!

"Indiana Jones, the swashbuckling fictional adventurer," said the *Los Angeles Times*, "would seem to have nothing on John Goddard."¹ For the record, Goddard did not accomplish every goal he set. He never *climbed Mount Everest* and his quest to *visit every country in the world* fell short by a few countries. But if there is a lesson to be learned from John Goddard's life it's this: *you won't accomplish 100% of the goals you don't set.*

"Faith is being sure of what we hope for," said the writer of Hebrews, "and certain of what we do not see."² Goal setting is faith building! It not only stretches your faith, it's good stewardship. Your goals will be as unique as you are, reflecting your personality and passions.

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I discovered John Goddard's life goal list when I was twenty-nine, and it became the catalyst for me creating my own list. My initial brainstorm resulted in twenty-five goals. Over the years, I've added to and subtracted from that list. Before sharing my Life Goal List, let me outline seven steps to setting life goals.

1. Start with Prayer

Setting goals is a spiritual exercise—it's dreaming big, praying hard, and thinking long. Praying is a form of dreaming, and dreaming is a form of praying. It's not outlining your agenda to God. It's getting into God's Word and God's presence, and letting God outline His agenda to you. Prayer is the way we get on God's wavelength. When a goal is set in the context of prayer, there is a much higher likelihood that it will glorify God. And if it doesn't glorify God, it's not worth setting in the first place! Make sure your goals pass the *prayer test*.

If possible, take a prayer retreat. Set aside 24 or 48 hours. Turn off your phone. And go someplace that holds special significance in your life. Why? Change of *pace* + change of *place* = change of *perspective*. One more tip, take a journal. Your life goal list is a rough draft, but you need a place to capture thoughts, ideas, and dreams.

2. Check Your Motives

If you set selfish goals, you'd be better off *not* accomplishing them. That's why you need to take a long look in the mirror and make sure you're going after it for the right reasons. A goal is only as good as the motivation behind it. Make sure your goals pass the *motive test*.

More than a decade ago, I had a paradigm shift when it comes to financial goals. I stopped setting "getting goals" and started setting "giving goals." Those giving goals changed my focus—you want to make more so you can give more. God doesn't bless us to raise our standard of living. God blesses us to raise our standard of giving. I want to set God-honoring goals so God can bless them.

3. Think in Categories

When it comes to goal-setting, it's hard to know where to start. It can feel as random as roulette. My advice? Think in categories! Some common types of goals include physical, mental, spiritual, relational, occupational, and financial. You can also think in terms of experiential and influential goals. Experiential goals include the places

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you want to go and the things you want to do. Influential goals are other-focused. They revolve around the legacy you want to leave.

To jump start the goal-setting journey, look at a few life goals lists. I've included mine for that very reason. I would encourage you not to cut-and-paste too much, because to reach your goals, they have to be *YOUR* goals. But it's okay to browse as a way of getting your own ideas. I've borrowed some of my goals from others, but I've always found a way to put my fingerprint on them.

4. Make it Measurable

If a goal isn't measurable, it's not manageable. You have no way of knowing if you've accomplished it. Losing weight and getting into shape are not goals, they are desires. You turn it into a goal by giving yourself a target weight and a target timeline. Make sure your goals pass the *measurement* test.

One of the ways I've made my goals measurable is time-stamping them. There are physical challenges I want to accomplish during different decades of my life. It's not easy attaching numbers to your goals, especially giving goals, but I'd rather aim high and fall short than aim low and hit the target. If you realize that you didn't dream big enough, it's okay to make revisions to your visions! My original goal was to write twenty-five books, but I recently upped the ante to forty books.

5. Write It Down

"Write down the vision," said the prophet Habakkuk, "and make it plain on tablets."³ Paper tablet or digital tablet, same difference! The shortest pencil is longer than the longest memory. Something powerful happens when you verbalize a goal, especially in writing. Neuropsychologists call it the *generation effect*. We have a better memory for things we *write* over and above things we *read*. That may be stating the obvious, yet the reality remains: *only 3% of people have written goals*. Make sure your goals pass the *written* test.

Writing down your goals helps you remember them, but it also holds you accountable. Yes, you can revise the goal. But writing it down creates a category in your reticular activating system. It's the part of the brain that determines what gets noticed and what goes unnoticed. When you set a goal, it creates a category in your RAS and you'll notice anything and everything related to it. Plus, you'll have a written record of God's faithfulness when the goal is accomplished.

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6. Add A Relational Element

My goals used to revolve around me, myself, and I. I have replaced those personal goals with shared goals. How? By adding a relational element. Kissing my wife on top of the Eiffel Tower is far more fun than simply going to the top! Make sure your goals pass the *relationship* test.

Nothing cements a relationship like a shared goal. Goals are relational glue, and they double the joy when the goal is achieved. God Himself set the standard with the Great Co-mission. Yes, I added the hyphen. And I've done the same with my life goals. Many of my goals revolve around my family—they are tailored to the unique personality and passions of my wife and children. I've hiked the Grand Canyon rim-to-rim with Parker, written a book with my daughter Summer, and biked a century with Josiah.

7. Celebrate along the Way

Goals come in lots of sizes and shapes—big and small, short-term and long-term. You need some God-sized goals that will take a lifetime to accomplish. Why? Big goals turn us into big people! If you want to dream until the day you die, set goals that will take a lifetime to achieve.

One key to going after God-sized goals is reverse engineering them into smaller wins. I ran a marathon a few years ago, but the key was the training plan. I did 72 training runs totaling 475 miles. That's 72 days of winning the day so that on marathon day, I could win *THE* day. I didn't just celebrate when I crossed the finish line, I celebrated new mile makers along the way! You need to celebrate what you want to see more of. When you accomplish a goal, throw a party. That's how you turn wins into winning streaks!

Before sharing my Life Goal List, let me put these seven steps together one more time:

- 1) Start with Prayer
- 2) Check your Motives
- 3) Think in Categories
- 4) Make it Measurable
- 5) Write It Down
- 6) Add a Relational Element
- 7) Celebrate along the Way.

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Mark Batterson's Life List

(revised December 1, 2020)

The goals that are *italicized* are goals that have been accomplished

Relational Goals

1. Celebrate 50th Wedding Anniversary
2. Live long enough to dedicate my great grandchildren
3. *Celebrate an Anniversary in Italy*
4. *Celebrate an Anniversary in the Caribbean*
5. Take each of my children on a mission trip
6. *Coach a sports team for each of my children*
7. Pay for our grandchildren's college education
8. *Create a Family Foundation*
9. Leave an Inheritance for our children
10. Write an autobiography
11. *Create a Discipleship Covenant*
12. *Take Each Child on a Rite of Passage Pilgrimage*
13. *Create a Family Coat of Arms*
14. Research our Family Genealogy
15. Find and Visit an ancestor's grave in Sweden
16. *Take our grandchildren to a State Fair*
17. Go on a camping trip with our grandchildren
18. Celebrate a family reunion in Alexandria, Minnesota

Influential Goals

19. Write 40+ non-fiction books
20. Pastor one church for 40+ years
21. Help 1,000,000 dads disciple their sons
22. *Speak at a College Commencement*
23. *Speak at an NFL Chapel*
24. *Write a New York Times Bestseller*
25. *Write a fiction title*
26. *Start a Mentoring Group for Pastors*
27. Create a Conference for Writers
28. *Create a Conference for Pastors*

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29. *Teach a College Course*
30. Lead National Community Church to 10,000+ in weekly attendance
31. Baptize 3000 people in the same place at the same time
32. Build an Orphanage in Ethiopia
33. *Get a Doctoral Degree*
34. Start a chain of coffeehouses that give their net profits to kingdom causes
35. Help plant 100+ churches
36. Make a Movie
37. *Host a Podcast, Radio, or TV program*

Financial Goals

38. *Be debt-free by 55*
39. Give back every penny we've earned from National Community Church
40. Live off 10% and give 90%
41. Give away \$5+ million
42. *Lead National Community Church to give \$25,000,000 to missions*

Experiential Goals

43. *Take Summer to a Broadway Play*
44. *Hike the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu with Parker*
45. *Go to a Super Bowl with Josiah*
46. *Spend a Night on Catalina Island with Lora*
47. *Go Paragliding with Parker*
48. *Go Cliff Jumping*
49. Take one of my children to a Film Festival
50. *Learn how to snowboard*
51. Learn how to Surf
52. *Take a Helicopter Ride over the Grand Canyon*
53. *Take a Rafting Trip through the Grand Canyon*
54. *Take a three-month Sabbatical*
55. Do a Silent Retreat at a Monastery
56. Go on an overnight Canoe Trip with my grandkids
57. Hike across Catalina Island
58. Read the Bible from cover-to-cover in seven translations
59. Take a Hot Air Balloon Ride
60. *Go Horseback Riding as a Family*
61. Spend a Night in a Tree House Hotel
62. Hike the Camino de Santiago in Spain

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63. Run with the Bulls in Pamplona
64. *Play a round of golf at St. Andrews in Scotland*
65. Do a Stand-Up Comedy Routine
66. Take Lora to the Oscars
67. Go to a TED Conference
68. Retrace one of Paul's Missionary Journeys
69. Take an RV vacation as a family
70. *Hike to the top of Half Dome*
71. *Stay at the Ahwahnee Lodge in Yosemite*
72. *Visit the Biltmore Mansion*
73. *Stay at Old Faithful Inn at Yellowstone*
74. *Hike to Inspiration Point at Lake Jenny*
75. *Go to a Rodeo out west*
76. Climb to the Cliff Churches in Lalibela, Ethiopia
77. Visit the Meteora Monasteries in Greece
78. *Go on an African Safari*
79. See a Kangaroo in Australia
80. Snorkel the Barrier Reef
81. *Kiss Lora on top of the Eifel Tour*
82. See the Aurora Borealis in Iceland
83. Go kayaking in Alaska
84. *Visit the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany*
85. Take a Boat Cruise down the Rhine River
86. Ride a Gondola in Venice
87. *See the Sunrise on Cadillac Mountain*
88. *Straddle the Equator*
89. *See the Blue Grotto in Italy.*
90. Visit the Parthenon in Athens, Greece.
91. *Take a Carriage Ride through Central Park*
92. *Stay at the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island*
93. *Hike the Grand Canyon from Rim-to-Rim*
94. Climb a 14er
95. Swim the Escape from Alcatraz with Summer
96. *Run a Triathlon with Parker*
97. *Bike a Century with Josiah*
98. *Run a marathon*
99. Run a triathlon in my sixties
100. Do a full *Ironman Triathlon*

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Footnotes

¹ <https://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-john-goddard-20130521-story.html>

² Hebrews 11:1

³ Habakkuk 2:2