The Next Faithful Season

A Prayerful Review of Your Life, Calling, and the Road Ahead

> *"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."*
> **Psalm 90:12 NIV**

Shortly after I retired, I spent an afternoon with my longtime friend and mentor Paul Stanley and Dr. J. Robert Clinton, whose work has focused on how God forms people over a lifetime.[1]

Each of us was experiencing some kind of transition, so our conversation naturally turned toward what might lie ahead. Robert introduced me to what he called a destiny analysis. He encouraged me to look back over the things I believed God had spoken to me through the years and ask what they might mean now. What had already been fulfilled? What remained unfinished? Were there people or organizations with whom I should consider working?

He also encouraged me to think carefully about how I could steward my time, abilities, and resources in the years ahead. I could no longer say yes to every worthwhile opportunity. I needed to understand which ones truly belonged to me and which ones, however good, needed to receive a gracious no.

I took his counsel and set aside time to work through those questions with God. It became a powerful and clarifying experience. I did not come away with a detailed plan for the rest of my life, but I gained a clearer sense of how to approach the years ahead. I began to recognize what deserved my attention and what I needed to release. I could also see more clearly how to offer what God had taught me in service to His kingdom.

That experience became the seed of this guide.

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God’s purposes often unfold slowly. Some parts of our story make sense only when we look back. Experiences that once seemed unrelated begin to reveal a pattern. Even disappointment or delay may have formed something within us that could not have developed another way.

At the same time, we may be carrying promises that have not yet been fulfilled or work that still feels unfinished. We may sense that something is ending without knowing what will follow it. This review is not an attempt to predict the future or place ourselves in control of it. It is an opportunity to remember God’s faithfulness, consider what He may be doing now, and become more available for what faithfulness requires.

Before You Begin

This is not primarily a planning exercise. It is meant to be completed prayerfully, in conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Set aside enough uninterrupted time to move through it slowly. Two or three hours may be sufficient, though you may want to return to some sections later. Bring your Bible and journal. You may also want to gather past journal entries, prophetic words, significant letters, previous purpose statements, or anything else that has helped you recognize God’s direction.

Begin each section by asking the Holy Spirit to bring to mind what matters and to help you see it honestly. When something seems significant, do not hurry to interpret it. Write it down, pray over it, and test it against Scripture. Some things will become clear quickly. Others may require time.

Before you begin, consider asking your spouse and one or two trusted people to pray for you. After you have worked through the guide, share your emerging conclusions with someone who knows God and knows your story. A spiritually mature friend, mentor, or counselor can often recognize patterns or blind spots that are difficult to see from inside our own lives. Their role is not to make the decision for us, but to help us listen and test what we believe we are hearing.

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You might begin with a simple prayer:

Lord, I place my preferred outcome before You. By Your Spirit, help me recognize what You have been doing in my life and what faithfulness requires now. I am willing to follow wherever You lead.

1. Look Back Over the Road You Have Traveled

Begin by dividing your life into its major periods. Give each one a simple name and note the important relationships, decisions, disappointments, and unexpected turns within it.

Do not look only for visible accomplishments or dramatic spiritual experiences. Pay attention to what was being formed in you. Consider the people God used, the responsibilities you were given, and the events that changed how you understood Him or yourself.

When I first came to faith in Christ, I assumed that serving God meant leaving engineering behind. I stepped away from my studies and relinquished my Army ROTC scholarship, planning to go to Bible college because I wanted to prepare for ministry. When that path did not open as I expected, I eventually returned to engineering school. By then, the scholarships were gone, so I finished through loans, work-study, and whatever else was necessary.

For a long time, that part of my story could have looked like a wrong turn. Only later did I begin to understand what God had been doing. He had not wasted either part of my preparation. My growing life with God shaped my understanding of people. Engineering prepared me for responsibilities I could not yet imagine. In time, faith and leadership would become woven through my work in ways I could not have foreseen as a young man.

That experience taught me to be careful about judging any period of life too quickly. What looks like an interruption may become preparation. A closed door may redirect us without invalidating the desire that first led us there. Sometimes we recognize what God was

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forming only after enough years have passed for the pieces to come together.

As you look back, consider:

1. Which experiences have most deeply shaped the person I have become?

2. Where can I now recognize God's guidance or provision, even if I did not understand it at the time?

3. How have difficult or unexpected experiences prepared me for responsibilities that came later?

4. What patterns continue to appear in the people I am drawn to help, the concerns that move me, or the opportunities that come my way?

Resist the temptation to make every event fit neatly into a predetermined story. Some things may remain mysterious. The purpose is simply to notice where patterns have genuinely emerged and where God's faithfulness has become visible.

2. Recognize What God Has Entrusted to You

Calling is not only about what we accomplish. It includes the person we are becoming and the people already entrusted to us.

Over time, certain convictions become settled within us. Some concerns continue to draw our attention. We discover abilities that seem to carry unusual life when they are offered to others. We also learn that not every good opportunity is ours to pursue.

Consider what God has placed within your care:

1. What convictions or values have guided the most important decisions of my life?

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2. What abilities, spiritual gifts, learned skills, or life experiences has God repeatedly used to help others?

3. Which people or needs consistently stir something within me?

4. Where have others recognized something helpful or life-giving in what I offer?

Your answer does not need to sound impressive. Calling is often expressed in ordinary faithfulness. It may be visible to many people or known only to those closest to us. Its value is not determined by the size of its audience.

If you are in a later stage of life, consider what should now be passed on and to whom. It may be something you have learned, a resource you can share, or an investment in another person. Legacy is not merely what remains after us. Much of it is given away while we are still present.

3. Understand the Season You Are In

Every stage of life carries its own responsibilities and limitations. What was right for an earlier time may no longer be right now. An assignment may have been fruitful and still be complete. Something new may be stirring, but the time to act may not yet have arrived.

Before asking what comes next, describe your present circumstances as honestly as you can:

1. What appears to be beginning in my life, and what may be coming to an end?

2. What might God be forming in me that matters more than anything I am being asked to accomplish?

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3. Which relationships and responsibilities already entrusted to me must be honored as I consider anything new?

4. What limitations or present realities should shape any new commitment?

5. Am I continuing something mainly because it is familiar or difficult to release?

Our limitations are not inconveniences that must be overcome before we can obey God. They are part of the life within which obedience must be lived. Accepting them is not a lack of faith. It is part of wise stewardship.

4. Review What You Believe God Has Spoken

Most of us carry Scriptures, promises, personal words, or moments of unusual clarity that have influenced the direction of our lives. These should not all be treated in the same way.

A promise clearly given in Scripture carries an authority that a personal impression or prophetic word does not. A hope we deeply desire may be worthy of prayer without necessarily being a promise from God. Wise counsel may confirm something important, but it does not remove our responsibility to discern and respond.

Review what you have carried and, where possible, record the original wording, date, circumstances, and source.

Then consider:

1. Which Scriptures or settled convictions have continued to anchor my life?

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2. What personal words, recurring impressions, or moments of direction still seem significant?

3. What has already been fulfilled, even if the fulfillment looked different from what I expected?

4. What remains unresolved or is still being carried in hope?

5. Is there anything I may have misunderstood or tried to bring about in my own strength?

Hold what you believe God has spoken with both faith and humility. Personal words should be tested rather than forced. Our understanding may change as we mature. At other times, a word may remain quietly alive through years of waiting.

We do not need to manufacture its fulfillment. Our responsibility is to remain faithful to what God has made clear and allow Him to determine the manner and timing.

5. Consider What Faithfulness Requires Now

Bring the road behind you, what has been entrusted to you, your present responsibilities, and what you believe God has spoken into prayer.

Do not begin by asking how much more you can accomplish. Ask what obedience requires. God may invite you to undertake something new. He may instead ask you to finish something already underway, remain where you are, or release work that now belongs to someone else.

Consider:

1. What deserves my most faithful attention in the time ahead?

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2. What should I continue, and is there something new I should undertake?

3. What should I release because its time is over or because it no longer belongs to me?

4. Where might I need to wait rather than move prematurely?

5. Is there a person or organization with whom I should work, or someone I should prepare to carry something forward?

Saying no to something worthwhile may be necessary if it keeps us available for what has actually been entrusted to us. We have limited time and strength. We cannot give ourselves fully to everything.

This is also where wise counsel becomes especially important. One reason Paul Stanley's counsel meant so much to me was the history we shared. He knew my story. He had seen my strengths and the places where I could misread myself. Paul rarely tried to make decisions for me. He asked questions, shared what he had learned, and helped me notice things I might otherwise have missed.

That is the kind of counsel we need when considering what lies ahead. We are not asking someone else to hear God for us or assume responsibility for our choices. We are inviting someone we trust to help us recognize what may be difficult to see on our own.

For decisions that materially affect a marriage, agreement between husband and wife deserves patient attention. No one should use the words "God told me" to end an honest conversation or pressure a spouse into agreement.

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Gathering What You Have Heard

You may not finish this review with a complete picture of the future. That is all right. You do not need a ten-year plan. It is enough to recognize what deserves your attention now and how you can begin responding.

Complete these statements as simply as you can:

1. The season I believe I am in is:

2. What God appears to be forming in me is:

3. The responsibility that most needs my attention is:

4. What I am continuing to carry in prayer is:

5. What I believe I should release or decline is:

6. The next step I can take is:

7. The people with whom I will share and test this are:

Set a date to return to what you have written. Clarity may develop as you begin to act. Other conclusions may need to be adjusted. Revisiting them is not a sign that you failed to hear God. It is part of remaining attentive as circumstances change and your understanding deepens.

A Final Encouragement

Your life is not a project you must complete or a destiny you have to force into being. It is a life with God.

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He has been present in the years you understood and in those you did not. The future does not depend upon your ability to interpret every event correctly. It remains in the care of the One who has led you this far.

Your part is to stay close to Him and obey what becomes clear. What you cannot yet see can remain in His care.

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Companion Resources

> *Recognizing God's Fingerprints in Your Story* helps you look back at the experiences that have shaped you and consider what they may still have to teach you.

> *Learning to Hear God's Voice* offers practical guidance for discerning God's voice without forcing an answer.

> *Discovering Your Life Purpose* explores how your experiences, gifts, relationships, and calling may fit together.

Acknowledgment

I remain grateful to Dr. J. Robert Clinton for encouraging me to undertake this kind of review. His work on lifelong leadership development and the focused life has also informed this guide, particularly his emphasis on recognizing God's shaping over time. See J. Robert Clinton, The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development, and his paper "Passing On My Heritage".

The review process also reflects materials taught to me by Paul Stanley.

[1] J. Robert Clinton served as Professor of Leadership in Fuller Theological Seminary's School of Intercultural Studies from 1981 to 2016 and is Professor Emeritus of Leadership. Fuller Theological Seminary.

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