

USING THE NEW YEAR
TO STOCK-TAKE FOR JESUS

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2022 LIFE AUDIT

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**“IF YOU DO NOT KNOW WHERE YOU COME FROM,
THEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU ARE,
AND IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU ARE,
THEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING.
AND IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING,
YOU'RE PROBABLY GOING WRONG.”**

Those are the words of the British novelist Terry Pratchett, as he puts it in one of his *Discworld* novels. They're a perceptive nudge to get us checking our bearings. *Where am I? Where have I been, and where am I headed?* Know thyself. And it's this sentiment that lies behind the '2022 Life Audit'.

The initial idea behind this stock-take actually came from an online article by Melissa Kruger, 'New Year, New Beginnings: The Importance of Considering Our Ways'. I found Melissa's questions very helpful, so I took some of them, modified others, and added my own. A simple personal 'stock-take' worksheet was born, and we first used this at our church plant in Barrow in January 2018. When I shared a sample of it on Twitter, a few people saw it & asked for copy for their own church. So over the last couple of years we've developed it and it's proved popular, and generated feedback, so we've updated it and shaped it into what I hope is a stronger resource, the '2022 Life Audit'.

The whole 'New Year Resolutions' tradition *can* often feel like an exhausting exercise that burdens people with guilt, but personally I feel there's great value in using the natural marker of a new year to 'take stock'. As we'll consider, it can generally be very easy to 'reason our season' - to excuse the 'state of affairs' in which we find ourselves, rather than tracing the trajectory we're on and facing up to reality.

Of course, in all this we need to be very mindful that we're in the midst of a pandemic that has been the context of our lives for the last couple of years. We will be weary, disorientated, and reeling from a collective trauma, the likes of which hasn't been experienced by most in their lifetimes. Perhaps more so than normal, we need to give space to reflecting on the impact of this season of turbulence. And in our hoping and dreaming about the future, let us be kind to ourselves - as well as to our spouses, families, friends and colleagues.

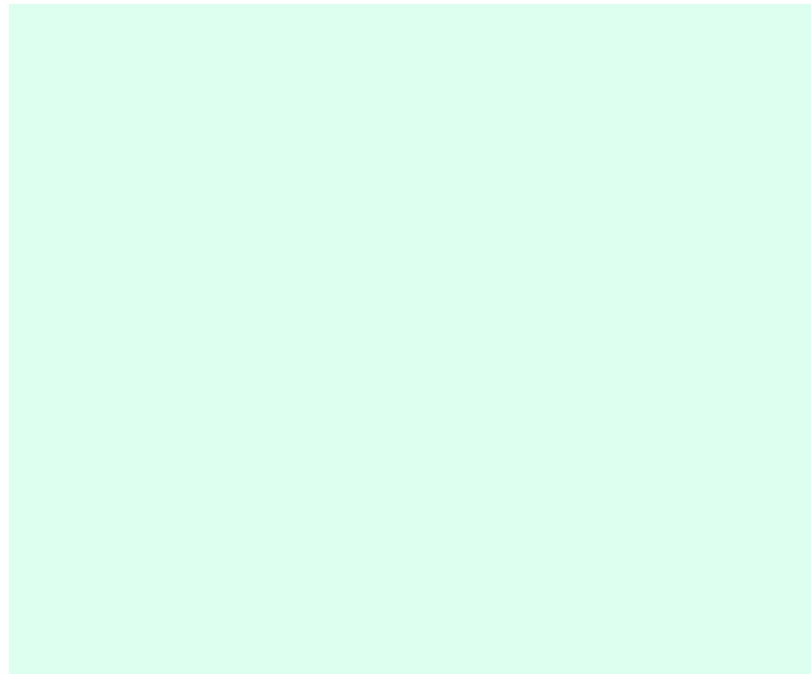
So why do we reflect and reset and re-envision ourselves? We do this to steward ourselves and the responsibilities entrusted to us as diligently as we can, as limited creatures. We do this because we want to discern where God is calling us to grow and change, in his strength. We do this because God gives 'ordinary means of grace', and we'd be fools if we neglected them. We do this because our lives are meant to be spent - indeed, they *will* be spent on something - and the question is 'what?'.

So make some space in your diary over the new year. Print out these sheets. Find somewhere you'll be undisturbed. Put your favourite music on and grab a pen. Don't feel you have to complete it all. Touch base with a loved one and perhaps share and pray through your responses. Of course, be honest with yourself, but take what's useful and leave what's not.

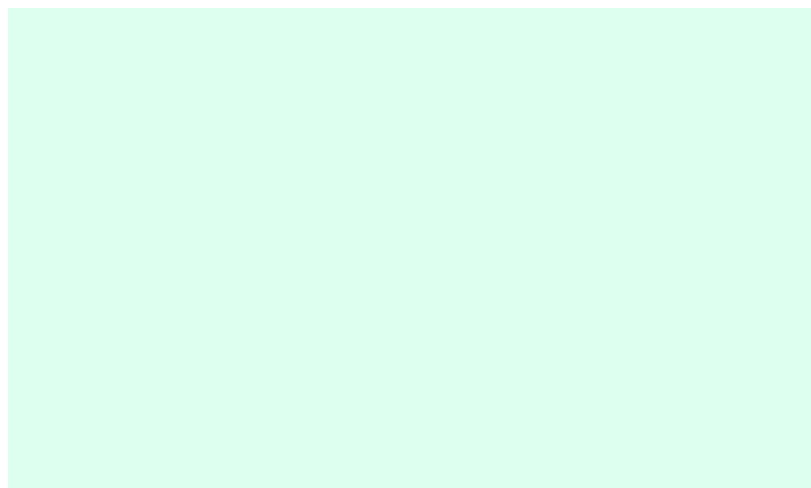
And let's pray as we reflect on our lives, we'd be more conscious of his grace, more dependent upon his Spirit, more committed to his people, and more willing to 'abound in the work of the Lord', knowing our labour is not in vain' (1 Corinthians 15:58).

LOOKING BACK

As you look back at 2021, how do you see
God's work in your life?



Is there a particular part of Scripture or
verses that God has used in your life this year?



Where did you see God
using your gifts to serve others?



A large, empty rectangular area with a light green background, intended for a response to the first question.

What were some of your
deepest struggles in 2021?



A large, empty rectangular area with a light green background, intended for a response to the second question.

What were some of your
greatest joys in 2021?



A large, empty rectangular area with a light green background, intended for a response to the third question.

WHY ASKING ABOUT TRAJECTORIES BEATS REASONING YOUR 'SEASON'

When was the last time you gave some thought to what trajectories your life practice is setting?

Someone challenged me on this recently, and I found it a helpful way to really make me think hard about the patterns of life and ministry that are – whether I like it or not – becoming engrained into the way I conceive of what my working week looks like.

A few years ago I was travelling to see some old friends. Despite distances, we've committed to try and spend intentional time with each other at least twice-a-year, 'debriefing' on our lives and looking out for each other. So on the train down to see them I tried to ponder this question of trajectories. I ended up grabbing a serviette and plotted out my ministry & life practices, as if they were setting a course for my future.

And as I scribbled I realised that often I fail to think of my patterns in the present as a trajectory to the future, because I rationalise them instead. I explain them away (even if just to myself) as a unique 'season' that will soon change.

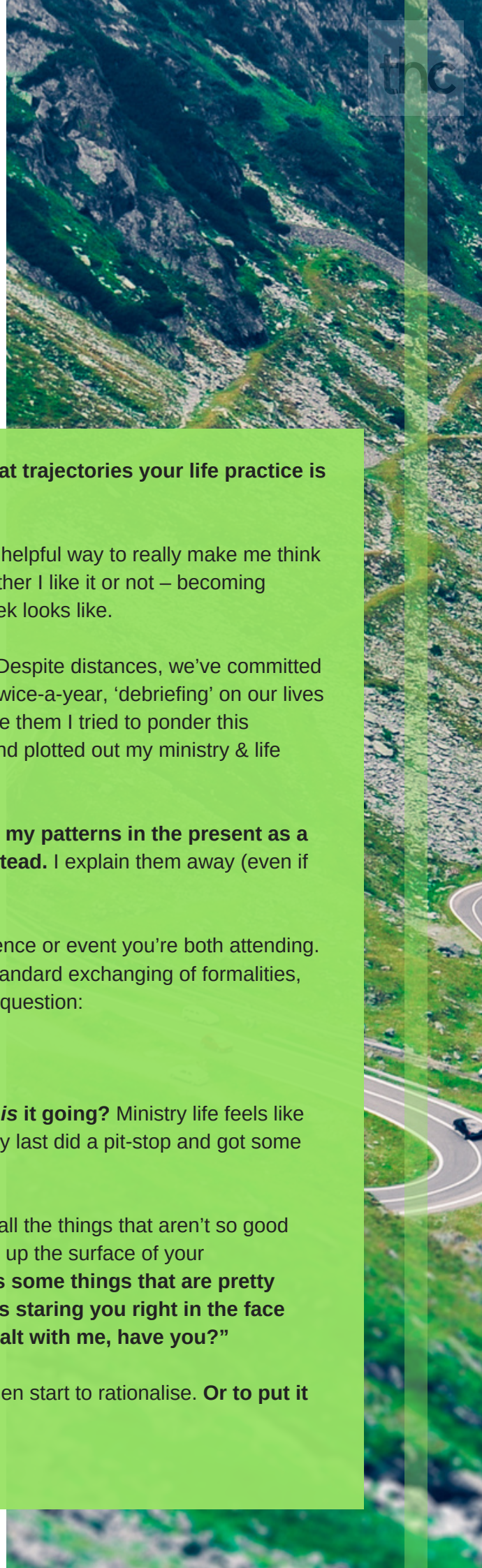
Picture the scene: you bump into a friend at some conference or event you're both attending. You know each other from way back and so you do the standard exchanging of formalities, and then they ask what sometimes feels like the dreaded question:

"So how's it going anyway?"

First-off, your brain freezes. **Good question – how even is it going?** Ministry life feels like an endless to-do list and you're not sure when you actually last did a pit-stop and got some perspective on it all.

But second, your memory slowly begins to remind you of all the things that aren't so good about life and ministry right now. They come floating back up the surface of your consciousness like memories of a bad dream. **Ok, there's some things that are pretty much out of your hands, but then there's all the others staring you right in the face with a fixed smirk that says, "Yep, you still haven't dealt with me, have you?"**

And so, thirdly – if you're anything like me, that is – you then start to rationalise. **Or to put it another way, you list the excuses:**



"There's good reason why things are the way they are right now..."

"We're just in a particular season at the moment – it'll slow down as soon as X is over..."

"I know that's not ideal, but sometimes you have to compromise..."

I don't know what it is you're tempted to excuse, but I know what it's been for me...

...my devotional life ... my prayer time for ministry ... spending less time with people and more time in my office ... quality time with my spouse or close friends ... letting admin run riot over word ministry ... trading off my theological convictions for convenience ... wasting hours on social media ...

And in all these things I'm quick to reason the 'season away', rather than asking the much more illuminating and galvanising question of what trajectory I'm setting.

If things carried on the way they are, where would I be in 3 years time? 5? 10?

Or to put it more specifically: What would be the shape of my ministry? How healthy would my marriage be? How much will I have shifted from my convictions? What would be the state of my physical health? What kind of church am I involved in building?

And it's not just that "what's the trajectory?" is a 'scarier' question (and so more likely to produce change by showing you the end results). It's also a fair question. **My patterns in the present do become my default way of operating.** Habits are hard to break. That's just the way it is.

Like the stream that gradually wears down the stones, carving out a new pathway for itself and becoming near-impossible to re-route, so the habits we build up in the present become the course we take for the future. 'Seasons' becomes years, years become...

Of course, in all this we need to remember grace. The point of asking ourselves such questions isn't to beat ourselves up. And there will be seasons. COVID has been one such season - and an extraordinary one at that. But there will be others: genuine periods of transition or adjustment. A new role; taking on new staff; a new baby... But where unhealthy practices are building into unhealthy habits, it's healthy to want to change – and I need God to help me do that. And perhaps even with COVID, we can be tempted to pretend it is a temporary blip. The reality is that it has been our context for two years. Life now is our 'new normal'. We need to guard against always referring to life pre-COVID for our barometer of how we're doing. This is where we are now. And what struck me in that train carriage on the way to see those friends a few years ago is that it can be very tempting to always 'reason the season'.

So have you found 'what trajectory am I setting?' to be a helpful question? And what are the areas you particularly focus on? What have I missed in the italicised paragraph above?

An original version of this article is available for sharing online

at: <http://thathappycertainty.com/ministry-2/why-asking-about-ministry-trajectories-beats-reasoning-your-season/>

RECALIBRATING THE HEART

Over the past year, where have you tended to find your sense of identity? We'll shortly spend some time focusing on roles and responsibilities, but it's important to do that once we've first considered our identity.

Our roles must flow out of our given *Christian* identity, grounded in the gospel of grace, rather than our roles effectively *creating* our identity.

Some of us are driven by power, or approval, or comfort, or control. To get a sense of where you seek your identity, try completing the following sentence:

"If I'm honest with myself, life often seems to only have meaning when/if..."

The Bible describes how every Christian's identity is twofold:

- i) **a creaturely identity:** we are creatures made in the image of God, with a humble dignity and God-given value, created to know and serve our Creator, imaging his loving rule to the world
- ii) **a redeemed identity:** we have been forgiven our sin and united to Jesus Christ, through faith, not because of anything we have done, but by God's undeserving grace. Day by day, we are being conformed to the image of Jesus and one day we will live with him in a perfected world.

How do you find keeping your heart calibrated to your 'identity in Christ'? In what ways might you need to do this more? What might this look like?



A GOSPEL NET TO CATCH OUR DAYS

The American writer Annie Dillard wrote, '*How we spend our days is how we spend our lives*'.

To state the obvious, a year is made-up of 365 *days*. We might be phased about the challenges and opportunities of a *whole* year, but it's important to ground that in terms of **days** and **weeks**. The habits we employ each day are going to shape us over time in ways that resolutions on their own never can.

Over the next two pages we're going to reflect on daily and weekly rhythms and habits, both looking back and looking forward. We are all creatures of habits, even if those are habits we've never questioned or acknowledged. Consider what you do when you first wake-up, or when you get home from work, or how you spend your weekends. These routines, rhythms and norms are all habits.

How do you feel about your daily and weekly habits in 2021? You might like to consider: your prayer life; time in the Bible; rest; time with family & friends; sleep; time on your phone; physical health...

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What might an 'ideal' average working day/week look like for you, in terms of rhythms that help you push the gospel into the 'nooks and crannies' of your life?



	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN
7-8							
8-9							
9-10							
10-11							
11-12							
12-1							
1-2							
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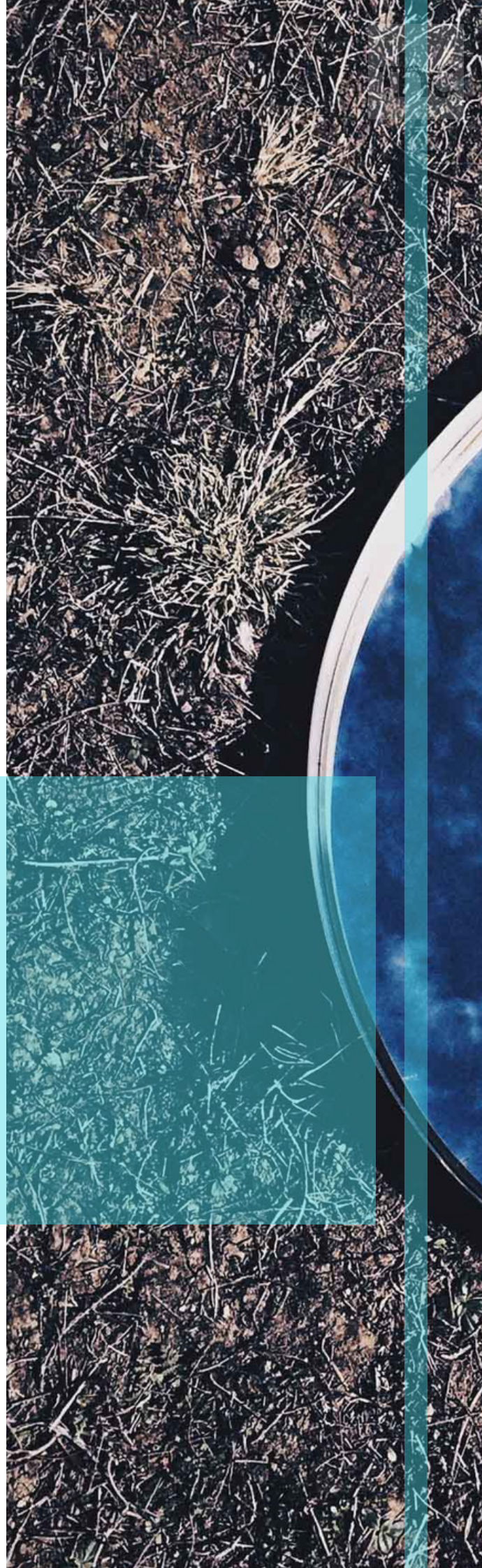


WHERE GOD HAS PLACED ME

This section is heavily influenced by Tim Challies' 'How to Get Things Done' blog series, which also made up his book 'Do More Better'. Available at www.challies.com

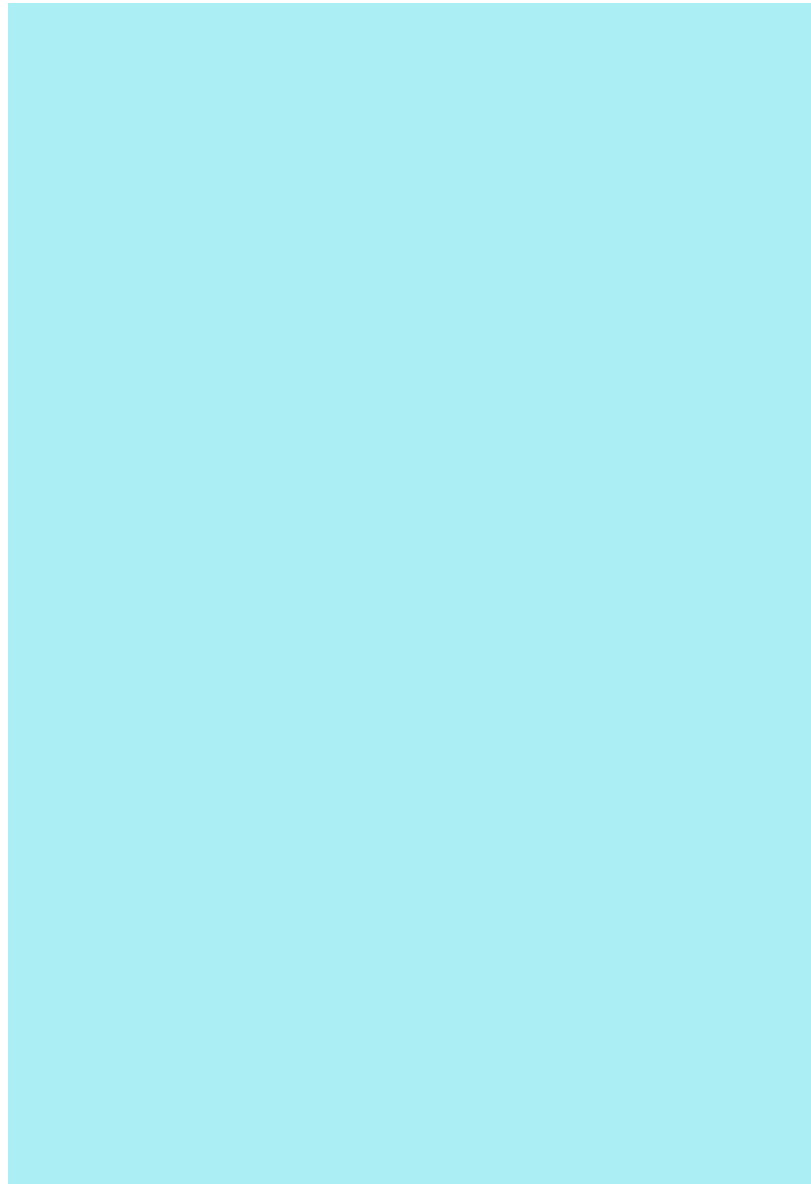
List your different areas of responsibilities, e.g. Personal, Family, Social, Church, Work, Other? ' Tim Challies says, "You need to have everything you are responsible for in life encompassed in one of these categories, yet with as few categories as possible."

Now overleaf, note down the various **roles** you have within each area of responsibility. These are "the specific tasks, roles, projects or responsibilities" that have been assigned to you **in each area of responsibility, including family relationships**. Be thorough and aim for fewer roles that encompass more.






Now try and write a 'mission statement' for each of your **areas of responsibility**. The aim is that these provide focus and direction for the various **roles** which make up an area of responsibility. These can serve as a week-by-week measuring stick to see if you're achieving your 'mission' with each role.



Now prayerfully compare each **area of responsibility's 'mission statement'** with the various **roles** listed within that particular area of responsibility. Do these things fit with the mission? Which roles need to be reconsidered or adjusted?

Do some need to be *delegated*? Or *dropped*? Or *done* - but out of a sacrificial desire to serve others?





**'TEACH ME YOUR
WAY LORD, THAT I
MAY RELY ON YOUR
FAITHFULNESS;
GIVE ME AN
UNDIVIDED HEART,
THAT I MAY FEAR
YOUR NAME**

PSALM 86:11

REACHING OUT

Which five friends or acquaintances could you commit to praying for this year - that God might use you to bring them to trust in Jesus Christ?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What holds you back in this area?



PRAYER

People have described prayer, Bible-reading, and church as God's 'ordinary means of grace', i.e. the normal ways that God uses to keep us going as Christians.

How do you feel about your prayer life in 2021?

What practical steps could you take to help your prayer life in 2022?

What keeps you from prayer?



BIBLE

Do you have a routine for spending time in the Bible regularly?

How do you personally plan to read the Bible this year?

Is there a study guide or reading plan or set of devotional notes you could use to help?

How could others be involved in your Bible reading this year?



FIGHTING SIN

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Are there particular sins you feel you've especially and consistently struggled with in 2021?

What means could you make use of to better battle sin in your life (e.g prayer, confession, accountability, Bible verses)?

What are your 'sin blindspots'? Why not ask a trusted Christian friend for their perspective on your life and where you need support?



CHURCH

Are you committed to a local church? What words would you use to describe that commitment in 2021? How was it impacted by Covid?

What could you commit to praying for your church and church leaders this year?

How many weeks/Sundays in a year are you prepared to miss church in 2022 (e.g. for vacations/weekend trips/other)?

What might it look like for *you* to help your church be a growing, spiritually-healthy church in 2022?



SERVING ON YOUR FRONTLINE

What are the three contexts you spend most of your time (not including church)?

1.

2.

3.

How could you be more intentional about being a 'good neighbour', a witness to Christ, and a source of spiritual encouragement in these contexts?

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GENEROSITY

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When has your giving of your **time** been generous, sacrificial & cheerful in 2021?

When has your giving of your **money** been generous, sacrificial & cheerful in 2021?

When has your giving of your **service & gifts** been generous, sacrificial & cheerful in 2021?

What will you *practically* decide to do differently in 2022?



LOVING GOD

Imagine yourself growing in your love for God this year - what is the difference between yourself as you *imagine* you *could* be, and yourself as you see yourself *now*?

How can you keep your heart gazing at Jesus this year? What are the 'idols' you're tempted to see as more valuable/worthy/glorious?

LOOKING FORWARD

What things cause you most excitement about 2022?

What things bring you most concern or anxiety for 2022?

What might it look like to see both areas as part of learning to trust God & know him better this year?

