

Three to Five Year Vision Work©

Nick Howard, Psy.D.

www.finishwellgroup.com

With this exercise, the goal is to develop a one to one and a half page summary of your ideal life three to five years from now. In terms of length, I think it is best for this to be something that you can review in 15 minutes or less. With that accomplished, you can review your vision on a regular basis to help renew your energy and deepen your commitment to your ideals. From my vantage point, ideals point to three basic areas: things that will #1) honor God; #2) bless others, and #3) draw you further into fullness. So, ideally your three to five year vision work will hit all three of those, as when all those are present in a vision, it really helps create a sustained, lasting ministry and legacy.

In terms of doing the exercise, I encourage you to take about an hour or so for it. I would encourage you to select either 3, 4 or 5 years out for this work, so that there is a clear context in your mind. (If you want to go out further, like up to 10 years, if that feels right to you, go ahead.) Choosing the number of years out can depend on any major change (e.g., retirement, kids graduating, a sense for when you might be moving or changing roles) that may be coming at a certain time. If you sense more than less change is coming, I'd encourage you to go three years out instead of five. Another factor to consider is what feels better for you as a time frame in terms of what would really energize you...more or less time to realize some dreams. Before addressing categories of life for your visioning work, two fundamental things need to be addressed.

As you are envisioning, there are really two core things you are likely to be imagining. The first is what it would look like *ideally* in the category you are thinking about at the end of the time frame you are considering. For example, if you have landed on a three year time frame for your vision work and you are considering the "Relationship with God" category, the image you are looking for is: what you would love to see in your relationship with God at the end of those three years. Imagine that as if it is in the present tense, and let yourself enjoy the feelings and connotations that go along with what you think it would be like. Then write down the images and ideas that come to mind in the present tense. So, in that category, it might be writing something like this:

My walk with God is better than it has ever been. I am abiding in Him throughout the day more than I ever have. I have a depth of peace and trust that is a powerful antidote against anxiety. I go to Him when I first get up, and my time with Him brings great perspective, trust and focus to my day. I feel really grounded, at peace, and alive in His love and goodness.

Notice that the statement is written in the present tense and taps feelings like grounded, at peace and alive. The idea is to tap your heart with these statements, to help generate positive energy and momentum to your God-honoring ideals.

The second main thing you can look to create in vision work are statements that speak to structure, or in other words, the kinds of things you will need to incorporate into your

life on a regular basis to make it much more likely that your vision will be realized. These are statements that include references to things like making time, or doing certain activities that support realizing the vision. Regarding the “Relationship with God category, it could be something like:

I am increasingly faithful in practicing spiritual disciplines, including setting aside retreat time and solitude time to receive more of His wisdom, perspective and strength. I go to Him when I first get up, and my time with Him brings great perspective, trust and focus to my day. It feels so great to be increasingly rooted in God and to have relationships and structures built into my life that draw me closer to Him, and genuinely help protect from some kind of crazy fall.

The above references to setting aside time, when I first get up, and having structures in my life, help move our minds to ideas that support creating structure and brings greater energy to eventually living in more and more alignment with the ideals. Now, if that part doesn't feel as good to you, you can leave that part out, and consider using that part in setting a goal or goals, which is going to be by definition more concrete.

Below are listed major life categories that vision work ideally can address. Please look over the categories, and customize them for yourself, depending on your unique life situation. You may want to add or combine categories as well, or subtract some, so that you are not overwhelmed, but have something that feels just right for you. Then with your categories selected, I encourage you to take each category, one at a time, and invite God to lead your imagination as you envision what that category would look like ideally in 3 to 5 years. Again, while you are imagining, envision both the ideal realized, and if you'd like the steps or structure you'll need in place to move the direction of the vision. Then, simply write out the few sentences or so that capture both the ideal realized and again if you want, the ways you'll get there. Below the categories are listed some more examples to give more of a feel for this work.

Enjoy the process, and enjoy reviewing this important work as you seek to move closer to “God's good, perfect and pleasing will” for you.

Categories to Consider:

Your ideal:

Relationship with God

Relationship with your spouse

Relationship with your kids

Financial scenario

How your house or apartment and/or yard is set up to give you life.

What kind of shape you would like to be in physically

How you are doing emotionally (i.e., your level of peace, freedom, etc.)

How you would like to be eating

How you would like to be doing in your vocation or work role

How you are growing professionally
What kind of friendships you have
What you are doing for vacations
What you are doing for hobbies and self-care

More sample vision statements:

Our house and yard are in great shape. Our home is truly life-giving and we have it set up to bring our hearts closer to God through the safety, symbolism and beauty in our house. We have beautiful trees and the yard and landscaping are great. The prints and decorations are a wonderful blend of contemporary and woodsy furnishings that bring life to my soul. We have special places for being still with God, which nurtures our relationship with Him.

Our finances are in great shape. We have an honest budget that we work within and we are saving and giving in responsible ways. It feels so great to be on top of that and to be able to spend money we've saved for things we have planned to buy. It also feels outstanding to be tithing in more and more generous ways as we manage our money more responsibly.

Our marriage is also doing really well. We connect very deeply and support each other throughout the day, providing support and comfort for each other. We really enjoy our dates and other rich times together. We enjoy meaningful times of praying together and support each other in growing in our faith. My wife is a huge blessing in my life, a gigantic blessing in my life, and I am really growing in loving her in meaningful ways.

Our kids are doing really well too. I am doing better and better as a Dad in how I engage with them from a place of love, wisdom, strength and patience. I really enjoy our individual times together, and enjoy naturally bringing the Lord into our times together. It is remarkably fulfilling to see them grow spiritually, emotionally, and physically into people I love like crazy and am so proud of.