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12 SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL FAMILIES

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12 Secrets of Successful Families

We hear a lot about what goes wrong in families that fail. But what goes right in those that succeed?

- Between 1990 and 2015, the divorce rate in the United States doubled for those over the age of 50 and tripled for those over 65.
- Parents are confused: Some experts recommend giving children constant praise, while others advocate tough love.
- Young people are entering adulthood without the skills they need to succeed.

Nevertheless, the fact is . . .

- Marriage can be a rewarding and permanent bond.
- Parents can learn to discipline their children with love.
- Young people can gain the skills they need for adulthood.

How? This issue of *Awake!* will discuss 12 secrets of successful families.



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FOR COUPLES

1 COMMITMENT

WHAT IT MEANS

Husbands and wives who are committed to their marriage view it as a permanent bond, and that creates a sense of security between them. Each spouse is confident that the other will honor the union, even in difficult times.

Some couples feel compelled to stay together because of social or family pressure. Far better, however, is a sense of commitment that is based on mutual love and respect.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “A husband should not leave his wife.”—1 Corinthians 7:11.

“If you are committed to your marriage, you allow yourself to be wronged. You are quick to forgive and quick to apologize. You view problems as obstacles, not as deal breakers.”—Micah.

WHY IT MATTERS

When confronted with problems, spouses without commitment are more likely to conclude, ‘We just weren’t made for each other’ and look for ways to get out of the marriage.

“Many people go into marriage knowing that they have a ‘fallback plan’—divorce. When people enter marriage already thinking about the possibility of divorce, their commitment is lacking right from the start.”—Jean.

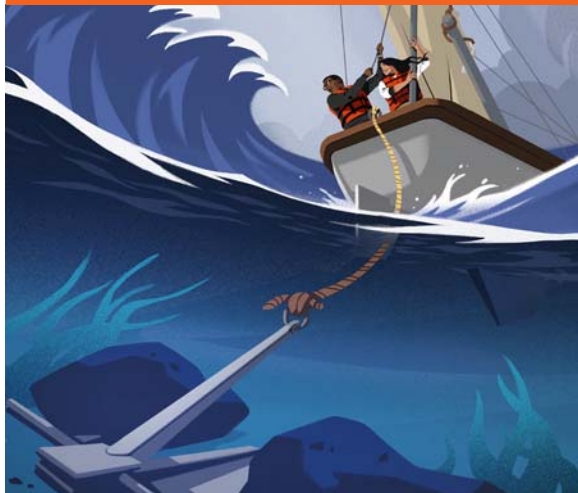
WHAT YOU CAN DO

TEST YOURSELF

When in the middle of a dispute . . .

- Do you find yourself regretting that you married your spouse?
- Do you daydream about being with someone else?
- Do you say things such as “I’m leaving you”

Commitment is like an anchor that keeps your marriage steady during stormy times



or “I’m going to find someone who appreciates me”?

If you answered yes to one or more of those questions, now is the time to strengthen your commitment.

DISCUSS WITH YOUR SPOUSE

- Has the level of commitment in our marriage decreased? If so, why?
- What steps can we take now to strengthen our commitment?

TIPS

- Write an occasional love note to your spouse
- Show your commitment by displaying photos of your spouse on your desk at work
- Phone your spouse each day while you are at work or apart

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “What God has yoked together, let no man put apart.”—Matthew 19:6.

FOR COUPLES

2 TEAMWORK

WHAT IT MEANS

When there is teamwork in a marriage, a husband and wife are like a pilot and copilot with the same flight plan. Even when challenges arise, each spouse thinks in terms of “we” rather than “me.”

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “They are no longer two, but one flesh.”—Matthew 19:6.

“Marriage is not a solo act. Husband and wife must work together to make it successful.”
—Christopher.

WHY IT MATTERS

When a conflict arises, a husband and wife who are not a team will tend to attack each other rather than the problem. Minor issues will turn into major obstacles.

“Teamwork is the essence of marriage. If my husband and I weren’t a team, we would be room-mates instead of marriage mates—two people who live together but who aren’t on the same page when it comes to important decisions.”
—Alexandra.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

TEST YOURSELF

- Do I view the money I earn as “all mine”?
- To relax fully, do I need to be away from my spouse?
- Do I keep my distance from my spouse’s relatives, even though he or she is close to them?

DISCUSS WITH YOUR SPOUSE

- In what aspect(s) of our marriage do we work well as a team?

Teamwork means that you are pilot and copilot with the same flight plan



- In what aspect(s) could we improve?
- What steps can we take to improve our spirit of teamwork?

TIPS

- Imagine a tennis match with the two of you on opposite sides of the net. Instead, what practical steps can you take to join your spouse so that you are both on the same team?
- Instead of thinking, ‘How can I win?’ think ‘How can we *both* win?’
“Forget about who is right and who is wrong. That isn’t as important as having peace and unity in your marriage.”—Ethan.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Look out not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of others.”
—Philippians 2:3, 4.

FOR COUPLES

3 RESPECT

WHAT IT MEANS

Respectful spouses care about each other, even during a disagreement. “These couples don’t get gridlocked in their separate positions,” says the book *Ten Lessons to Transform Your Marriage*. “Instead, they keep talking with each other about conflicts. They listen respectfully to their spouses’ perspectives and they find compromises that work for both sides.”

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Love . . . does not look for its own interests.”—1 Corinthians 13:4, 5.

“To respect my wife means that I appreciate her value and I don’t want to do anything that would damage her or our marriage.”—Micah.

WHY IT MATTERS

Without respect, conversation between spouses can become laced with criticism, sarcasm, and even contempt—qualities that researchers say are early predictors of divorce.

“Making snide remarks, innuendos, or jokes about your wife will only crush her confidence, destroy her trust, and damage your marriage.”
—Brian.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

TEST YOURSELF

Track your conversation and actions for a week. Then ask yourself:

- ‘How often did I criticize my spouse, and how often did I give her a compliment?’
- ‘In what specific ways did I show respect for my spouse?’

DISCUSS WITH YOUR SPOUSE

- What actions and words would help each of you feel respected?

Respectful speech is the mortar that can hold your marriage together



- What actions and words make each of you feel disrespected?

TIPS

- Write down three ways you would like to be shown respect. Have your spouse do the same. Exchange lists, and work on showing respect in the areas that were identified.
- Make a list of traits that you admire about your spouse. Then tell your spouse how much you appreciate those traits.

“To respect my husband means I show by my actions that I value him and that I want him to be happy. It isn’t always a grand gesture; sometimes a series of small acts can demonstrate genuine respect.”—Megan.

In the end, it is not a matter of whether you view yourself as respectful or not; it is a question of whether your spouse feels respected.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Clothe yourselves with the tender affections of compassion, kindness, humility, mildness, and patience.”—Colossians 3:12.

FOR COUPLES

4 FORGIVENESS

WHAT IT MEANS

To forgive means that you let go of an offense and any feelings of resentment it may have caused. Forgiveness does *not* require that you minimize the wrong or pretend it never occurred.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Continue putting up with one another and forgiving one another freely even if anyone has a cause for complaint against another.”—Colossians 3:13.

“When you love someone, you look past that person’s imperfections and instead see the person that he or she is trying to become.”—Aaron.

WHY IT MATTERS

If you hold on to resentment, you can harm yourself physically and emotionally—you can also damage your marriage.

“One time my husband apologized for something that hurt me deeply. It was hard for me to forgive him. I eventually did, but I regret that I didn’t do it sooner. It put an unnecessary strain on our relationship.”—Julia.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

TEST YOURSELF

The next time you are hurt by something your spouse has said or done, ask yourself:

- ‘Am I overly sensitive?’
- ‘Is the offense so serious that I *need* an apology, or can I just overlook it?’

DISCUSS WITH YOUR SPOUSE

- How long does it usually take for us to forgive each other?
- What can we do to get to the point of forgiveness quicker?

Forgiveness can put out the flames of a conflict



TIPS

- When you are offended, do not attribute bad motives to your spouse.
- Try to excuse your spouse’s behavior, remembering that “we all stumble many times.”—James 3:2.

“It’s easy to forgive when we’re both at fault, but it’s more difficult when the offense seems one-sided. Accepting an apology and forgiving takes true humility.”—Kimberly.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Be quick to settle matters.”—Matthew 5:25.

If you hold on to resentment, you can harm yourself physically and emotionally—you can also damage your marriage

FOR PARENTS

5 COMMUNICATION

WHAT IT MEANS

Genuine communication takes place when you and your children share a two-way exchange of thoughts and feelings.

WHY IT MATTERS

Communication can become especially challenging with teenagers. Perhaps not long ago, “it was like you had a backstage pass to your children’s lives,” says the book *Breaking the Code*. “Now the best you can hope for is a seat out in the audience, and it probably won’t even be a very good seat.” Contrary to appearances, when this happens children need communication the most!

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Adapt to your child’s timetable. Do so even if that means late-night conversations.

“You might feel like saying, ‘Now you want to talk? I was with you all day!’ But how can we complain if our children want to open up to us? Isn’t that what every parent hopes for?”—Lisa.

“I like my sleep, but some of the best conversations I’ve had with my teenagers have been after midnight.”—Herbert.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Let each one keep seeking, not his own advantage, but that of the other person.”—1 Corinthians 10:24.

Fight distraction. One father admits: “I sometimes find myself mentally multitasking when my children are speaking. And I’m not fooling them—they can tell!”

If you can relate to that statement, turn off the TV and put down all devices. Focus on what your child is saying, and treat his or her concern as worthy of your full attention, no matter how trivial it may seem.

“We need to assure our children that their feelings are important to us. If they think otherwise, they will keep their concerns locked inside or turn elsewhere for help.”—Maranda.

“Don’t overreact, even if your child’s thinking is way off center.”—Anthony.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Pay attention to how you listen.”—Luke 8:18.

Take advantage of informal settings. Sometimes children open up when they are not sitting face-to-face with a parent.

“We take advantage of car rides. Being side-by-side rather than across from each other has led to good discussions.”—Nicole.

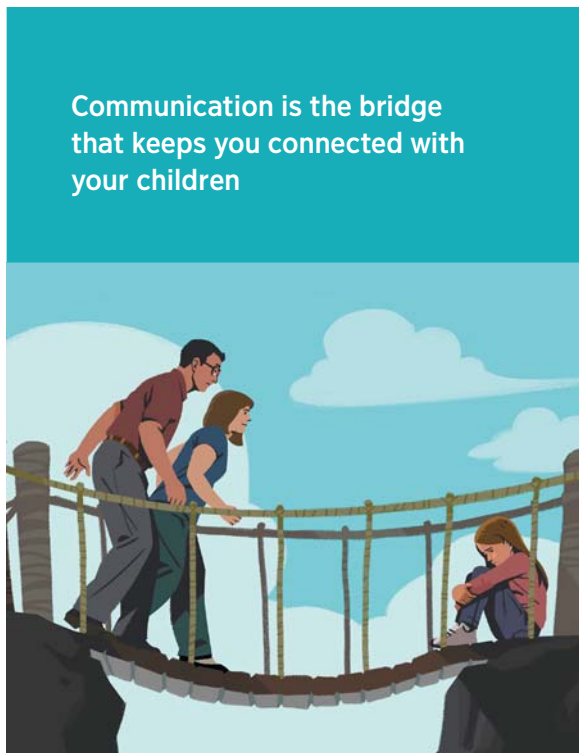
Mealtime presents another opportunity for informal conversation.

“At dinnertime each of us relates the worst thing and the best thing that happened that day. This practice unites us and lets each of us know that we don’t have to face problems alone.”

—Robin.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Be quick to listen [and] slow to speak.”—James 1:19.

Communication is the bridge that keeps you connected with your children



FOR PARENTS

6 DISCIPLINE

WHAT IT MEANS

The word discipline can mean to guide or to teach. At times, that includes correcting a child's misbehavior. Often, though, it involves imparting moral training that helps a child learn to make good choices in the first place.

WHY IT MATTERS

In recent decades, discipline has all but disappeared from some households, as parents fear that correction might lower a child's self-esteem. However, wise parents set reasonable rules and train their children to abide by them.

"Children need boundaries to help them grow into well-rounded adults. Without discipline, children are like a rudderless ship—which will eventually go off course or even capsize."—Pamela.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Be consistent. If your child does not adhere to your rules, enforce consequences. On the other hand, readily commend your child when he or she complies.

"I frequently commend my children for their being obedient in a world where obedience is so rare. Commendation makes it easier for them to accept correction when it is needed."—Christine.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: "Whatever a person is sowing, this he will also reap."—Galatians 6:7.

Be reasonable. Balance the child's age and competence level with the weight of the infraction. Consequences are usually most effective when they are related to the wrong—for example, misuse of the phone might result in the loss of phone privileges for a period of time. At the same time, avoid making major issues over minor irritations.

"I try to determine if my child has been deliberately disobedient or if he just made an error in judgment. There is a difference between a serious trait that needs to be weeded out and a mistake that just needs to be pointed out."—Wendell.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: "Do not be provoking your children, so that they do not become discouraged."—Colossians 3:21; footnote.

Be loving. Discipline is much easier for children to accept and apply when they know that a parent's primary motive is love.

"When our son made mistakes, we reassured him that we were proud of all the good decisions he had made in the past. We explained that the mistake wouldn't define him as long as he made the needed correction and that we were there to help him do that."—Daniel.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: "Love is patient and kind."—1 Corinthians 13:4.

Discipline guides a child the way a rudder steers a boat and keeps it on course



7 VALUES

WHAT IT MEANS

Values are the personal standards by which you choose to live. For example, do you strive to be honest in all things? Then likely you want to instill that moral value in your children.

Values also include *ethical* standards. For example, a person with solid ethics is industrious, fair, and considerate of others—traits that are best developed while a person is still young.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Train a child in the way he should go; even when he grows old he will not depart from it.”—Proverbs 22:6, footnote.

WHY IT MATTERS

In the age of technology, moral values are essential. “Bad influences can be accessed on any mobile device at any time,” says a mother named Karyn. “Our children could be sitting right next to us while they’re watching something indecent!”

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Mature people . . . have their powers of discernment trained to distinguish both right and wrong.”—Hebrews 5:14.

Ethical values are essential too. That includes extending simple courtesies (such as saying “please” and “thank you”) and showing concern for others—a value that has become rare, as people seem more interested in devices than they are in people.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Just as you want men to do to you, do the same way to them.”—Luke 6:31.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

State your moral values. For example, research shows that teenagers are more likely to abstain from premarital sex if they have been given the clear message that such conduct is wrong.

TIP: Use a current event to initiate a discussion about values. For example, if the news reports a hate crime, you could say: “It’s horrible the way some people show such anger toward others. How do you think people become like that?”

“It’s a lot harder for children to choose between right and wrong if they don’t know what is right or wrong.”—Brandon.

Teach ethical values. Even younger children can learn to say “please” and “thank you” and to show regard for others. “The more children see that they are part of something larger than themselves—a family, a school, a community—the more readily they perform acts of kindness that benefit everyone, not just themselves,” says the book *Parenting Without Borders*.

TIP: Assign chores to your children to help them learn the value of serving others.

“If our children get used to doing chores now, they won’t be shocked when they live on their own. Taking care of responsibilities will already be a part of their life.”—Tara.

Good values, like a reliable compass, can help your child determine which way to go



FOR PARENTS

8 EXAMPLE

WHAT IT MEANS

Parents who set the example live by what they teach. For instance, you could hardly expect your son to be truthful if he overheard you say, “Tell him I’m not home,” when you do not want to speak to someone at the door.

“A common saying is ‘Do as I say, not as I do.’ But that approach doesn’t work with children. They are like sponges that absorb everything we say and do, and they will tell us when our example isn’t consistent with what we try to teach them.”—David.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “You, the one preaching, ‘Do not steal,’ do you steal?”—Romans 2:21.

WHY IT MATTERS

Children and even teenagers are influenced more by their parents than by anyone else—including their peers. That means you are in the primary position to guide your children in the right way—provided, of course, that you practice what you preach.

“We can repeat something a hundred times and wonder if our child is listening, but the one time we don’t do as we say, the child will point it out. Children pay attention to everything we do, even when we don’t think they do.”—Nicole.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “The wisdom from above is . . . not hypocritical.”—James 3:17.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Examine your own standards. What type of entertainment do you watch? How do you treat your spouse and children? What kind of friends do you have? Are you thoughtful of others? In short,

are you the kind of person you want your children to become?

“My husband and I don’t hold our children to a standard that we ourselves don’t live by.”—Christine.

Apologize for your mistakes. Your children already know that you are not perfect. By saying “I’m sorry” when appropriate—both to your spouse and to your children—you will provide a valuable lesson in honesty and humility.

“Our children need to hear us admit when we are wrong, and they need to hear us apologize for our error. If we don’t, they will only learn to cover over their mistakes.”—Robin.

“As parents, we have the greatest influence on our children, and our example is the greatest tool we have because they see it all the time. It’s the book that’s always open, the lesson that’s always being taught.”—Wendell.

What kind of path are you setting for your children to follow?



9 IDENTITY

With a strong personal identity,
you can withstand powerful storms



WHAT IT MEANS

Your identity goes far beyond your name and appearance. It involves your values, beliefs, and character. Really, your identity is everything that makes you, you—both inside and out.

WHY IT MATTERS

When you have a strong sense of identity, you stand up for your beliefs instead of allowing your peers to control you.

“A lot of people are like the mannequins you see in a store display. They don’t choose the clothes they wear; others do.”—Adrian.

“I’ve learned how to stand up for what is right even when it’s hard. I can tell who my real friends are by how they act and by how I act around them.”—Courtney.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Stop being molded by this system of things, but be transformed by making your mind over.”—Romans 12:2.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Develop a sense of who you are *now* and who you want to *become* by analyzing your strengths, your weaknesses, and your convictions. A good way to start is to answer the following questions.

Strengths: What talents and skills do I have? What are my strong points? (For example: Am I punctual? self-controlled? hardworking? generous?) What positive things do I do?

TIP: Are you having trouble identifying positive things about yourself? Ask a parent or a trusted friend what strengths he or she sees in you and why.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Let each one examine his own actions, and then he will have cause for rejoicing in regard to himself alone, and not in comparison with the other person.”—Galatians 6:4.

Weaknesses: What aspects of my personality need the most work? When am I especially susceptible to temptation? In what areas could I exercise greater self-control?

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “If we make the statement, ‘We have no sin,’ we are misleading ourselves.”—1 John 1:8.

Convictions: What moral code do I follow, and why? Do I believe in God? What evidence has convinced me of his existence? What actions do I consider to be unjust, and why? What convictions do I hold about the future?

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Thinking ability will keep watch over you, and discernment will safeguard you.”—Proverbs 2:11.

10 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Obeying your parents is like paying off a debt to the bank. The more reliable you are, the more trust (or credit) you will receive



WHAT IT MEANS

Trustworthy people earn the confidence of their parents, friends, and employers. They abide by the rules, keep their promises, and always tell the truth.

WHY IT MATTERS

In almost every case, the amount of freedom you receive is directly related to the level of trust you have earned over time.

“The best way to earn your parents’ trust is to demonstrate that you are mature and responsi-

ble, not only when you are with them but also when they are not around.”—Sarahi.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Keep proving what you yourselves are.”—2 Corinthians 13:5.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Whether you want to earn more trust or regain lost trust, the following steps can help.

Be honest. Nothing will shatter others’ trust in you quicker than lies. Conversely, when you are open and honest—especially about your mistakes—you can earn the trust of others.

“It’s easy to be honest when things are going well. But being honest about things that cast you in a bad light goes a long way in building trust.”—Caiman.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “We wish to conduct ourselves honestly in all things.”—Hebrews 13:18.

Be dependable. In one U.S. survey, 78 percent of human-resource professionals indicated that reliability was “one of the three most important skills for entry-level positions.” Learning to be dependable now will benefit you as an adult.

“My parents notice when I’m responsible and do my chores without their having to nag me. The more I show initiative like that, the more they reward it with their trust.”—Sarah.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “I am confident that you will comply, . . . knowing that you will do even more than what I say.”—Philemon 21.

Be patient. Unlike physical growth, which is readily apparent to others, time is often needed for others to recognize emotional and mental growth.

“There’s no single act that can earn the trust of your parents and others. But you can build it gradually if you’re consistently responsible over time.”—Brandon.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Clothe yourselves with . . . patience.”—Colossians 3:12.

11 INDUSTRIOUSNESS

Learning to work hard is like exercising; it benefits you now and in the future



WHAT IT MEANS

Industrious people do not shy away from work. Rather, they enjoy working hard to provide for their personal needs and to help others—even if the work they do is not glamorous.

WHY IT MATTERS

Like it or not, life is full of responsibilities. In a world where many dislike the idea of working hard, being industrious puts you at an advantage. —Ecclesiastes 3:13.

“I’ve learned that when you work hard, you get a sense of pride and inner satisfaction. That feeling of inner satisfaction has actually caused me to

learn to like work. Having a strong work ethic will help you build a good reputation too.”—Reyon.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “There is benefit in every kind of hard work.”—Proverbs 14:23.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Cultivate a positive view of work by following the steps outlined here.

Take pride in learning to do things well. Whether you are doing chores, finishing your assigned homework, or engaging in secular work, immerse yourself in what you are doing. Once you can perform a task well, look for ways to improve—doing it faster or better. The more skillful you are, the more you will enjoy your work.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Have you seen a man skillful at his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before common men.”—Proverbs 22:29.

See the bigger picture. In almost every case, when you care for your responsibilities well, you benefit others. For example, when you are industrious about your chores, you lighten the load for others in your family.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving.”—Acts 20:35.

Go the extra mile. Instead of doing just the bare minimum, try to do more than you are required to do. In this way, *you* are in control of your life—doing more, not because you are forced to, but because you choose to.—Matthew 5:41.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Your good deed may be done, not under compulsion, but of your own free will.”—Philemon 14.

Be balanced. Industrious people are not lazy, nor are they workaholics. They aim for balance, finding enjoyment both in hard work and in periods of rest.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Better is a handful of rest than two handfuls of hard work and chasing after the wind.”—Ecclesiastes 4:6.

12 GOALS

Goals are like blueprints;
with effort, you can turn
them into reality



WHAT IT MEANS

A goal is more than just a dream—something you wish would happen. Real goals involve planning, flexibility, and good, old-fashioned hard work.

Goals can be short-range (taking days or weeks to accomplish), medium-range (months), and long-range (a year or more). Long-range goals can be reached through a series of intermediate goals.

WHY IT MATTERS

Reaching goals can boost your confidence, strengthen your friendships, and increase your happiness.

Self-confidence: When you set small goals and reach them, you gain the confidence to take on bigger ones. You also feel more confident when facing day-to-day challenges—such as standing up to peer pressure.

Friendships: People enjoy being around those who are reasonably goal-oriented—that is, those who know what they want and are willing to work for it. Moreover, one of the best ways to strengthen a friendship is to work with another person toward a common goal.

Happiness: When you set and reach goals, you feel a sense of accomplishment.

“I love having goals. They keep me occupied and give me something to keep reaching for. And when you reach a goal, it feels great to look back and say, ‘Wow, I really did it! I accomplished what I set out to do.’”—Christopher.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “If you wait until the wind and the weather are just right, you will never plant anything and never harvest anything.”
—Ecclesiastes 11:4, *Today’s English Version*.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Take these steps to set and reach your goals.

Identify. Make a list of potential goals, and prioritize them—choosing the ones you want to work on first, second, third, and so forth.

Plan. For each goal, do the following:

- Set a realistic deadline.
- Plan the steps involved.
- Anticipate obstacles, and think of how to overcome them.

Act. Do not wait until you have every detail worked out to get started. Ask yourself, ‘What is the very first thing I can do toward reaching my goal?’ Then do it. Track your progress as you complete each step.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “The plans of the diligent surely lead to success.”—Proverbs 21:5.



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