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youth connecting **faith & life**

## When I Was Your Age

**F**or the most part, everybody always wants to be just ahead of where they are in life. Someone ahead of us in age, capability, or accomplishment catches our eye and we want to be like him or her. This isn't always, or even usually, a jealousy thing. Very often it's simply motivation for us. We want to be older. Better. We also want those same people to affirm our success when we get there, which presents its own set of issues.

### Moving Through Life

The problem is that when our goal-setting hinges on the satisfaction that we think we'll feel when we've achieved the high ground of those around us, we're moving through life without a complete perspective. We don't know the sorrows and losses of the people we're chasing. More importantly, any part of us that needs a pat on the back when we "arrive" will quickly discover that, when we hit our goal, our targets have been moved: Those people are now older, more capable, and more accomplished. How can we ever catch up?

It is good to set goals, but setting goals to impress others generally ends in dissatisfaction. If we can't be satisfied by our own journey, regardless of the opinion of others, we're setting ourselves up for disappointment. As Christians, if we move our goals outside of our relationship with God, we're setting ourselves up for an unfulfilling life.

### Moving Toward God

Culturally speaking it's a difficult task to refocus our lives on God if our attention has wandered elsewhere. This is true at any age, but particularly as a youth when the influencing voices seem to be shouting from all corners. Coaches, teachers, band directors, parents, colleges, and even at times the church can seem to demand more than one person can possibly give. But if we want to find peace and true fulfillment in life, we have to begin to move ourselves in a God-focused direction.



**Sometimes  
our life  
goals are  
like moving  
targets!**

## Tip for This Issue

In today's issue of LINC, we're wrestling with setting life goals in a way that honors God with our lives. At some point we, and our youth, must ask ourselves the hard question of whether or not we actually *want* to honor God with our lives—or if we're simply trying to get away with saying we do while making no effort to follow through. At the end of the day, we know where we stand. Can you live with your choice?

# Teacher Bible Prep

## WHAT'S NEXT?

**PURPOSE:** To help youth center their identity in Christ.

**QUESTION OF THE DAY:** What major achievement are you looking forward to next?

**CULTURAL CONNECTION:** Growing Up

**TOPIC:** Setting Life Goals

### The Kids Are “Alright” 1 Timothy 4:12-16

Don't neglect the spiritual gift in you that was given through prophecy when the elders laid hands on you. Practice these things, and live by them so that your progress will be visible to all. —1 Timothy 4:14-15

#### Commentary:

We can waste a lot of time worrying about what other people think about us. With nearly two thousand years having passed since 1 Timothy was written, we can too easily pull the context of this passage to the present—a young pastor struggling with an “older crowd” of back-pew critics. Clearly that's not quite the situation in which Timothy found himself. The writer of 1 Timothy challenges the reader to live into her or his call in such a way that age never enters the conversation. Don't hesitate or get hung up in doubt about the person that you are.

#### Questions to think about:

- When you were younger, in what situations did you feel like your age was a liability?
- How did you overcome that feeling?
- Where in your life is it important to consider the expectations of others?
- Are there places and times when you allow those expectations to influence you too much?

### Mush Mouth Exodus 4:1-15

But Moses said to the LORD, “My Lord, I've never been able to speak well, not yesterday, not the day before, and certainly not now since you've been talking to your servant. I have a slow mouth and a thick tongue.” —Exodus 4:10

#### Commentary:

There are times when our expectations of ourselves propel us to a new level of accomplishment or satisfaction in life or faith. There are other times when



our expectations of ourselves in a given situation can paralyze us, rendering us completely ineffective for the Kingdom.

Moses had already seen and experienced amazing things from God, but here he balked at an opportunity to serve God's purpose. Empowered with miraculous signs, he still didn't recognize that his abilities were sufficient for the task at hand.

Ultimately God allowed Aaron, Moses' brother, to go along and do the speaking for Moses. Moses missed out on an opportunity to extend his personal abilities and deepen his faith in how he could be used by God.

#### Questions to think about:

- When are you most inclined to doubt yourself?
- When you're in doubt, is it usually more about the circumstances or your abilities? How does one influence the other?
- When do your expectations of yourself make a situation better?

### Horse of a Different Color Matthew 19:16-22

Jesus said, “If you want to be complete, go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come follow me.” But when the young man heard this, he went away saddened, because he had many possessions. —Matthew 19:21-22

# Teacher Bible Prep

## Commentary:

The story of the young man in this passage resonates uncomfortably with the experience of what we often seek in American Christianity. The question, “What good thing must [we] do to have eternal life?” (verse 16b) immediately frames the idea of faith in what can be gained rather than what can be learned or how we can be changed.

Jesus gave the young man just enough rope to hang himself, knowing that the young man had lived his entire life by the law of his people. “Keep the commandments,” Jesus said (verse 17c). Jackpot! “I’ve kept all these” (verse 20a), the young man answered. Then Jesus revealed the truth: *Whatever it is that’s keeping you (and us!) from fully following him is what has to go.*

Are we also walking away saddened?

## Questions to think about:

- No one but you knows what the “thing” is that you’re holding onto as “yours.” We may give most of our life to God, but somewhere there’s always something that we hold back. What’s yours?
- How much do you think about what you’re willing to give up to truly follow God?

## DEVOTION: FLEECING THE FAITH

If there’s something we want to do in life, it’s pretty amazing what we’re willing to jump over, around, or rationalize in order to do it. We can usually figure out a way to buy a new car, but giving to the church takes some real number crunching. And vacation time is easier to plan than time spent on a mission trip. Most of the time it simply comes down to what we want.

Gideon had a call from God to restore Israel. “Totally happy to do that, God,” Gideon replied (Oversimplified Version). “But . . .”

Now read Judges 6:33-40.

It works out so neatly in Scripture; Gideon asks an absurd thing of God—twice—and both times his request is fulfilled. What if it hadn’t been? Do we lose the story of Gideon on a technicality?

- When have you tested an impulse to act on God’s behalf?
- How would simply responding to the impulse to act be an even greater act of faith?
- How would making your lone life goal honoring God simplify things for you? How would it complicate things?



**NEXT WEEK:** The Fourth of July means fireworks, lemonade, and the colors red, white, and blue! In honor of the holiday, next week’s **LINC** will look at a piece of the Fourth of July tradition—the colors of our flag—through a scriptural filter. What do the colors red, white, and blue mean in our faith? Find out next week!

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**Writer:** Kevin Alton

**Editor:** Jack Radcliffe ([jradcliffe@umpublishing.org](mailto:jradcliffe@umpublishing.org))

**Production Editor:** Pam Shepherd

([pshepherd@umpublishing.org](mailto:pshepherd@umpublishing.org))

**Template Designer:** Ken Strickland

# The Choices We Make

**GETTING READY:** You will need Bibles, copies of Page 6, pens or pencils, and markers.

## OPEN

### When I Grow Up (5 minutes)

Ask, “How do you go about setting your life goals?”

Depending upon the makeup of your group, you may have youth who are in very different places in terms of how they look ahead in life. Discuss their process for choosing and setting life goals.

## EXPLORE

### Talk Topic 1: When We Base Life on the Expectations of Others (10–15 minutes)

#### Middle School Option

Ask your group to spend a few minutes drawing self-portraits in the space provided on Page 6. When they’ve finished, ask those who wish to show their drawings. No making fun, please. After each drawing, ask:

- How did you decide what to draw first? What do you like about your drawing? What don’t you like?
- You don’t have to tell us what they are, but are there things about you (not just physical things) that you don’t like for people to notice? Why?
- How much do you think about what other people think of you when making choices in life? How does that affect your decision-making?

Now read aloud 1 Timothy 4:12-16. Then ask:

- What expectations do you think that older people in our church have about you?

- What about those expectations is good? What isn’t?
- How can you live in a way that honors other people’s feelings without also being limited by their expectations?

#### High School Option

Expectations seem to deepen for youth as they age. Talk about the ways your group feels pressured to perform to meet the rising expectations of parents or other adult figures in their lives. After a few minutes of good conversation, ask:

- How do you feel built up by those expectations? How do you feel torn down?

Now read aloud 1 Timothy 4:12-16. Ask:

- Do you feel as though people older than you have expectations or even restrictions about how you should live as a disciple of Jesus?
- Where does your life meet those expectations? Where do you disagree with them?
- Do you think those expectations limit you? How can you move beyond those limitations when setting goals for the future?

### Talk Topic 2: When We Base Life on the Expectations of Ourselves (10–15 minutes)

#### Middle School Option

Everyone has an, “I hope no one ever asks me to . . .” hidden away in a mental closet. It might be something you expect to be asked to do from time to time—praying for a meal in front of a group, public speaking at church—or it might be something less likely, such as dressing a wound, CPR, or harvesting corn. Get your kids talking about the actions or activities they hope no one will ever expect of them.

Next, form a circle. Whisper *your* “I hope no one ever asks me to . . .” into the ear of the youth on your right, but mumble the words when you whisper it. Say it once, mumbling in such a way that he or she understands some of your words but not enough to pass it on well. Repeat it once if necessary, but maintain your mumble and say, “Pass it on.”

All the youth, one at a time, will pass your words around to the last person in the circle, who will try to repeat aloud what you said. The final result is sure to be funny, so enjoy some time laughing together. Then ask:

- Does anyone remember what Moses didn’t want to do when God asked him to do it?

Read aloud Exodus 4:1-15, then ask:

- Moses’ expectation was that he would fail at what God was asking him to do. How have you similarly backed away from challenges in your life?



# The Choices We Make



- How do your life goals reflect your expectations of your own abilities? Do you only choose things you know you can accomplish?

## High School Option

Talk about the following:

- How do you set expectations for yourself in life? Do you base them on past experiences and performance, or do you set goals in a way that challenges you to do more?
- How do your expectations for yourself reflect your desire to grow as a disciple of Jesus?

Read aloud Exodus 4:1-15. Ask:

- How did God prepare Moses to return to Pharaoh?
- Would you have felt prepared to confront Pharaoh, even if you were nervous about speaking?
- How can you use expectations of yourself to improve the way you set life goals instead of letting them hinder you, as did Moses?

## Talk Topic 3: When We Base Life on the Expectations of God (10–15 minutes)

### Middle School Option

In the space provided on Page 6, ask youth to list their most important activities during any given week of the school year. Homework, sports, family time, TV, and video games are all reasonable activities to expect; encourage youth to add others. Talk about lists when they've finished. Then ask:

- How many of those activities do you think God is asking you to do each week?

It's not the easiest concept for middle schoolers to grasp, partly because we've learned to live lives that don't answer to God first and foremost. Ask again, "If we claim to live as disciples of Jesus, fully devoted to him, how many of our daily tasks revolve around what we feel called by God to do?"

Read aloud Matthew 19:16-22. Then, ask the following:

- What do you think the young man had going on in his normal life?

- How much of his life do you think he was willing to change to gain eternal life?
- How much did Jesus ask of him?

### High School Option

This may be the most direct conversation your group has had about filtering our life plans through God's expectations of us; you may be prodding sensitive places in their spirituality. Ask:

- As you develop your life plans, do you begin with your personal desires? At what point do you consider what God might be calling you toward?
- Are there areas of your life in which you don't bother to consider God first, or even second? What are they?

Read aloud Matthew 19:16-22, then ask:

- Clearly this young man had been following his culture's law, which he believed was given by God. What more was Jesus asking of him?
- In what ways have you been following "Christian culture" but are willing to admit it falls short of what Jesus asks of us?

## ! Bonus Small Group Discussion Option

Help youth give serious attention to how their lives answer—or don't—to the call of God. Ask:

- What does it look like in today's culture for someone to completely give her or his life to God? What do you like about that idea? What scares you a little?
- Have you ever considered a career path for ministry that directly contributes to "loving your neighbor," or that earns enough money for you to serve God freely? If so, what was the result? If not, why not?

Also ask:

- Are any of you certain that you're not called to a life of ministry?
- Recognizing how you are naturally gifted is a good start to setting life goals, but have you approached God to discern how to best use those gifts? How?

## TAKE AWAY

When making decisions or life plans, your first thought should be God.

# Work It Out



## Your Expectations

Spend a few minutes drawing a portrait of yourself inside the frame. Then think about what you like and do not like about your drawing.



## GOD'S EXPECTATIONS ✓

Write below your most important activities during any given week of the school year, such as homework or sports, but add all the things that take up your time. Do you think God is asking you to do all of the activities on your list?

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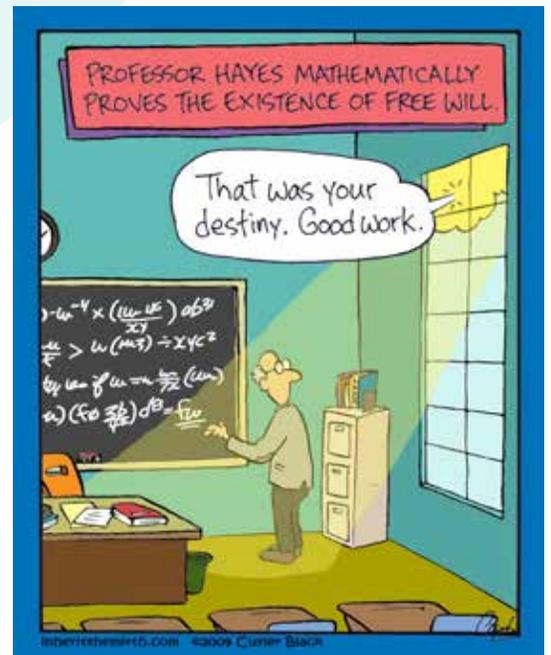


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### IN THE BIBLE: READINGS FOR THE WEEK

- Monday: Read Matthew 19:14.**  
How did Jesus explain the importance of young people?
- Tuesday: Read 2 Kings 22:1.**  
How do you think those around Josiah handled having such a young leader?
- Wednesday: Read Matthew 25:14-28.**  
When have your actions been motivated by fear instead of possibility?
- Thursday: Read 1 Samuel 17:28-39.**  
What would have happened if David had allowed his expectations of himself to be affected by the opinion of his brother and the king?
- Friday: Read 1 Samuel 15:1-23.**  
How was Saul's plan for life different from what God expected of him?
- Saturday: Read John 13:1-9.**  
What did Peter learn about what Jesus expected from him in regard to how he shows love to others?

### Inherit the Mirth



### WHAT'S TRENDING?

Why is it so hard to center our lives in Jesus? Tweet or post your response using #jesus to @AbingdonYouth or on Facebook: Abingdon Youth