

How Passionate 25-Year-olds Become Fruitful 45-Year-olds

At twenty-five, life is like a sheet of paper filled with ambitions, dreams, and almost endless possibilities. The decades stretch far into the future, offering multiple options. Books, media, and educators tell us that we can do or become anything we want to do or be. We believe this to be true. We know we can achieve great things and perhaps even change the world.

Then life happens day by day, month by month, and year by year. Hard things come our way, and we despair about ever realizing our dreams. We fall into a routine of work and social life. Before we know what happened, we are 45 years old and look back on our former ambitions and dreams with nostalgia and perhaps even regret that we didn't seriously pursue them. We can become cynical and blame others for not being able to see our plans become a reality. We thought we would be fruitful and fulfilled, but it didn't turn out that way.

A fruitful life is one that brings glory to God and that accomplishes the purposes he had for placing us on the earth. At the end of His life on earth, Jesus made this statement, "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do." (John 17:4). How do we reach the point at which we can make a similar statement? What gives us the right to say "I am doing the work You have given me to do"?

Here are some suggestions for translating ambitions and dreams into a fruitful life.

Define Success - Have a personal mission statement

No one is on this earth by accident or without a purpose. God placed you here for such a time as this. He gifted you and placed you in a nation, a community, and a family for a reason.

It is wise to take some time to reflect on what God might want to do with your life. What kind of person does he want you to be? How might he use you to bring glory to His name?

I encourage you to take some time in solitude and ask yourself some questions.

1. How would I like other friends and family members to describe me?
2. What is the most significant contribution I could possibly make to my world with the gifts God has given me?
3. What character traits do I genuinely value and would like to see modeled in my life?
4. Who have been role models in my life? Why do they inspire me? What elements in their lives do I want to see in my own life?
5. In the next three to five years, in what ways would I hope to mature in my relationship with God, family, friends, work associates, and community?
6. What will be the center of my life? Who or what am I going to live for?
7. What will be the character of my life? What kind of person will I be?
8. What will be the contribution of my life? Who do I have the desire to help most?
9. What will be the communication of my life? How will I share my life with others?

Form your answers to these questions into sentences to produce your personal mission statement.

Here is mine: I will grow in my relationship with God and my experience of His lordship in my life. I will provide nurture and support for my wife and family. I will work to encourage others, helping them to be successful. I will develop reserves of wisdom, spiritual strength, understanding, and love that will bless others. – Merle Burkholder

Be Faithful in the Little Things—Build habits into your life

Your mission statement will not be accomplished in a year or two, or perhaps even in a decade. You need specific, measurable, ambitious, realistic, and time-limited goals. What can you expect to accomplish in the next decade, the next three years, and the next year? What do you need to do each week or each month to realize your goals?

Then you create actions that you place in your schedule. These are small steps that, over time, will lead you to your goal. You are not going to go to a workshop or take a course that will suddenly result in you being the person God wants you to be.

Being faithful in the little things of life leads to significant accomplishments. I suggest that the men and women we look to as spiritual giants from the past did not set out to be spiritual

giants. They just faithfully got up each morning and did what God gave them to do. They did many small, rather insignificant things repeatedly that resulted in them achieving greatness in our eyes.

I encourage you to pursue faithfulness rather than greatness. Build habits into your life. Be faithful in practicing the habits and disciplines that will help you be the person God wants you to be and do the things God wants you to do.

Say Yes to God—Make your default answer to God be “yes”

God is looking for faithful people. The people who are faithful with small things, He knows, will also be faithful with big things. When God opens doors for us, we should be willing to walk through them.

It might seem like a rather insignificant thing to do—maybe cleaning the church, helping a child with homework, or teaching a Sunday School class. But when we are willing to do the small things, God gives us greater responsibilities.

We can excuse ourselves from doing things because we are afraid or think we might fail. Yet we seek adventure in other areas of life. Serving God is a walk of faith, which is an adventure. We do things for the Kingdom of God, not because we know we can, but because we know God can and that he will use us to do it.

If our default answer to the opportunities God brings us is yes, we will get to do some pretty amazing things.

Find Mentors—Learn from those who have experience

Fortunately, we don't have to learn everything from our own life experiences. The book of Proverbs is based on the concept that wisdom can be passed on from one generation to another. We can learn from those who have lived before us and build on their knowledge and experience.

Paul told Timothy, “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith,

longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra – what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.” (II Timothy 3:10 -11).

We need healthy, instructive intergenerational relationships. We can learn from others who have walked the road before us. I encourage you to find an older man or woman you respect and ask them if you can spend time with them. Ask them questions about their walk with the Lord and their own life experiences.

Deny Self—Make your life about the kingdom of God

Most of us spend way too much time thinking about ourselves. Jesus said the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves. He said all the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.

In order to find fulfillment in life, we must shift our focus from self to the Kingdom of God and others. In Jesus’s words, if we desire to save our lives, we will lose them, but if we lose our lives for the sake of Christ, we will find them (Matthew 16:25).

Our perspective is often focused on our lifetime, but that is so short compared to eternity. If we live life with an eternal perspective, then the things that will matter a thousand years from now will be the things that will be the most important today.

We can get caught up with the urgent things that demand our attention day to day and miss the important things that will matter from an eternal perspective. Jesus told his disciples, “Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest” (John 4:35). We, too, will find fulfillment when we lift up our eyes from the routine of our lives and see things from God’s perspective.

In Conclusion

Why did God place you on the earth at this time and in this place? What is the work He has for you to do?

Don’t fall into a mindless routine of daily life and focus only on self and the present time. Seek

God's direction for how you can be useful for His kingdom purposes. Work to lift your eyes and see the world with an eternal perspective.

Much needs to be done in our world. Many things are not as they ought to be. In the Lord's prayer, we are taught to pray, "Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven". If this is going to happen, it will be through you and me being servants of God and ambassadors of the Kingdom of God, bringing the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a world that has lost its way.

Living with that focus will help us grow from passionate 25-year-olds to fulfilled 45-year-olds who can say, "I am doing the work you have given me to do."