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Getting Off the Treadmill of Good Intentions

by Bill Allison



About ten years ago, I bought my first treadmill. Boy, did I feel great about myself. Just getting that thing down to the basement was a workout in itself—I think I lost half a pound! Once I got that thing settled in its place, I beamed with pride... and just knew that in a short time I'd be in shape... or at least in *better* shape.

Yet, I confess to you that though I have over a decade of treadmill ownership under my belt, my belt has not gotten any smaller. I thought about taking the treadmill back and trading it in for a new and improved model. Obviously, this one wasn't working.

But I think I finally figured out what's wrong. It seems you must actually get on the treadmill three to five times a week for about 20-30 minutes each time if you want any benefits. Go figure. Oh yeah, and they also tell me you should plug the treadmill in and turn it on (sounds kind of dangerous if you ask me).

The Treadmill of Good Intentions

Laugh at me all you want. But I'm willing to bet a rarely used ten-year-old treadmill that you're frighteningly more like me than you care to admit. Yep, my treadmill story is for YOU—especially if you've ever had the good intentions to...

- read a self-help book... but didn't help yourself enough to crack it open
- read the Bible through in a year... but didn't make it through the second week of January
- create and stick to a budget... but ran up more credit card debt
- lose weight... and then set a personal record in chocolate eating
- have a better marriage... and then actually argued with your spouse about *how* (Okay, that could be just me on that one.)
- be a more patient parent... and then yelled at your kids more than ever
- exercise regularly... and then used your treadmill as a clothes hanger

Just like me and my treadmill—you bought the books, took notes on the sermon, went to the Bible study, and even signed up for the seminar, but nothing really changed in the key areas of your life.

My question to you—before we go any further—is this: Are you sick enough of the treadmill of good intentions that you're really ready to move to the track of personal growth?

To Get Off the Treadmill, You Need to Get On the Track

If you really want to move off the treadmill of good intentions and onto the track of personal growth, I contend that, like a train, you must be careful to run on two rails. Of course, I'm not saying these are the only two keys to personal growth. All I'm saying is that the two rails I am about to explore with you are foundational if you really want to quit dinking around and start growing.

Rail #1: A Plan

If you REALLY want to move off the treadmill of good intentions and onto the track of personal growth, you're going to need a *written* plan. Yeah, I know. You don't like me now. Pick a number and get in line. But I have to tell you that the most important areas of my life jumped to a new and healthy level when I actually hand wrote my first personal growth plan almost ten years ago. That first written personal growth plan consisted of about fifteen different ways I hoped to cooperate with God in my life for that year. Frankly, on paper, it didn't look like much (check it out on the last page). But that simple, not-so-well-written piece of paper changed my life for good and God in substantial ways. Hence, I've written a personal growth plan every year since—and have encouraged everyone I know to do the same.



“Are personal growth plans biblical?”

I'm often asked, “Are personal growth plans biblical?” (Usually this is asked by someone seeking to avoid writing a personal growth plan.) Well, not long ago, I was studying the book of Proverbs—using the NET Bible. As I made my way through the first four verses of chapter one, I came across the word *discretion*:

- 1 *The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:*
- 2 *for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight;*
- 3 *for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair;*
- 4 *for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and **discretion** to the young*

According to the NET Bible, discretion means “wise planning; the ability to make plans or formulate the best course of action for attaining a goal.” What does “wise planning” and “the ability to make plans or formulate the best course of action for attaining a goal” sound like to you? That sounds like a personal growth plan to me. So yeah, I think personal growth plans have a biblical basis. I think those who write them are wise. I think when you dare to write a personal growth plan for your life, you are engaging the Proverbial concept of discretion.

Until you decide where you want to go, you might be moving, but you're not really going anywhere. That's why I think you **MUST** write a personal growth plan. The question is: Will you?

Indeed, I contend that writing a personal growth plan is the first rail of the personal growth track. But note well, you're also going to need a second rail: at least one person to take your personal growth journey with you.

Rail #2: A Partner

*Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, **along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.***
 —2 Timothy 2:22 (bold mine)

I think it's important to note that, according to 2 Timothy 2:22, the pathway to purity isn't just a matter of fleeing evil and pursuing good. Those two are great, but they are incomplete. You're also going to need a good partner (or several).

Note well that Paul instructed Timothy to flee evil and pursue good "along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." That, my friend, is the kind of partnership you're going to need if you're serious about moving off the treadmill of good intentions and onto the track of personal growth.



Are You Trying to Do the Job Alone?

Here's a shocker: Your personal growth is not a solo adventure. Reread that sentence again because if you're like most people, you're trying to grow yourself... by yourself. But that's not the way God designed it (Hebrews 10:24-25). You were wired by God to live in community. You need a few trusted friends and comrades to do life with and to take your personal growth journey with you. And they need you to join them in theirs. Yet, so many of us are stuck on the treadmill of good intentions precisely because we're alone. The following letter shows what can happen if you try to take the journey without partners.

*National Health Insurance, Inc.
 ATTN: Claims Review
 PO Box 17342
 New York, NY 12276*

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am writing in response to your request for additional information. In block number 3 of the accident report form, I put "trying to do the job alone" as the cause of my accident. You said in your letter that I should explain more fully, and I trust that the following details will be sufficient.

I am a bricklayer by trade. On the date of the accident I was working alone on the roof of a new 6-story building. When I completed my work, I discovered that I had about 500 pounds of brick left over. Rather than carry the bricks down by hand, I decided to lower them in a barrel by using a pulley, which fortunately was attached to the side of the

building, at the sixth floor.

Securing the rope at ground level, I went up to the roof, swung the barrel out, and loaded the brick into it. Then I went back to the ground and untied the rope, holding it tightly to insure a slow descent of the 500 pounds of brick. You will note in block number 11 of the accident report that I weigh 135 pounds.

Due to my surprise at being jerked off the ground so suddenly, I lost my presence of mind and forgot to let go of the rope. Needless to say, I proceeded at a rather rapid rate up the side of the building.

In the vicinity of the third floor, I met the barrel coming down. This explains the fractured skull and broken collarbone. Slowed only slightly, I continued my rapid ascent not stopping until the fingers of my right hand were two knuckles deep into the pulley.

Fortunately, by this time I had regained my presence of mind and was able to hold tightly to the rope in spite of my pain.

At approximately the same time, however, the barrel of bricks hit the ground—and the bottom fell out of the barrel. Devoid of the weight of the bricks, the barrel now weighed approximately 50 pounds.

I refer you again to my weight in block number 11. As you might imagine, I began a rapid descent down the side of the building.

In the vicinity of the third floor, I met the barrel coming up. This accounts for the two fractured ankles and the lacerations of my legs and lower body. The encounter with the barrel slowed me enough to lessen my injuries when I fell onto the pile of bricks, and, fortunately, only 3 vertebrae were cracked.

I'm sorry to report, however, that as I lay there on the bricks, in pain, unable to stand, and watching the empty barrel 6 stories above me—I again lost my presence of mind, and I let go of the rope. The empty barrel weighed more than the rope as it came back down on me and broke both my legs.

I hope I have furnished the information you require as to how the accident occurred.

Sincerely,

Billy the Bricklayer

Make no mistake about it: You need some partners on your personal growth journey.

True Confessions of a Couch Potato

As I look over my first few personal growth plans, I confess that I wrote an exercise goal each year... but never really got into the habit. I was a flash-in-the-pan exerciser. I may have even used the treadmill once or twice before I totally bombed out on the whole idea of exerting myself physically. I used to joke, "I do one sit up a day. Half when I wake up in the morning and the other half when I go to bed at night." I just couldn't sustain my good intentions when it came to regular exercise. My problem wasn't a lack of knowledge though. I knew, as a middle-aged man, I needed to get my heart beating for 20-30 minutes at least three times a week. With six kids, I was motivated. After all, I want to be around for them and my grandchildren (somewhere down the road). Nevertheless, I would dare to write a personal exercise goal in my personal growth plan every year... and that exercise goal mocked me for years... until...



One beautiful spring day several years ago, I asked my teenage son if he wanted to take a jog. To my surprise, he said yes. (I think he just wanted the pleasure of laughing at me while he ran circles around me.) So we went. Amazingly, I could walk the next morning. So we went jogging again that day. And the next day after that too. First it was one mile. A few months later it was two miles. Then three. My wife purchased matching running shoes for us (but don't tell my son's friends... that's so uncool). Soon, we sucked my wife into the exercise vortex and she began jogging with us. We were the jogging Allison family! We now jog an average of three times a week (with the exception of a few really cold weeks in the winter). I've been doing this going on three years now.

The question is WHY? What moved me from the treadmill of good intentions to the track of personal growth? Perhaps it was the matching running shoes. But I think it was the missing rail of partnership. I had exercise written in my personal growth plan for years, but I had no jogging partners. I was stuck... all by myself... on a treadmill. Think about a treadmill for a moment. A treadmill is made for one person. It's one of the reasons I never got around to actually using my treadmill. It was lonely. I needed partners. Once I got a partner or two, I was off and running (pun intended). And those partners have come in very handy, like when I don't feel like jogging. My son says, "What's wrong old man? Can't get out of your wheelchair? Don't want to leave your oxygen tank? Afraid I might out-run you?" Next thing you know, I'm lacing up my running shoes.

Do You Have a Proverbs 27:17 Partner?

"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

—Proverbs 27:17

How about you? Aren't you tired of taking the journey by yourself? What good things would happen in your life if you dared to invite someone into your personal growth journey this year? Who would be a great personal growth partner for you? Why not offer this person a mutually beneficial personal growth partnership for this year... and just see if a Proverbs 27:17 partnership makes any difference in your lives?

Two Rails, One Track, and God

I contend that these two rails—a plan and a partner—make up the track to personal growth. But let me be unmistakably clear: God must be your engine. God is the one who causes real spiritual and personal growth. Like a train engine, God must lead the way in your life. Like a train, it's your attachment to God (the engine) that enables you to move forward. I focused this entire article on the two rails that make up the track you must run on rather than the engine because I know if we get on the track and engage God as our engine—we'll go forward. I'm not worried about the engine. I'm worried about us getting our lives on the rails that will propel us forward. And I have good reason to be concerned. How so? Well, if you listen closely, you'll hear a faint call coming from your basement... it's coming from a barely used treadmill... agreeing with me. That relatively new treadmill is mocking you! What are you going to do about it?

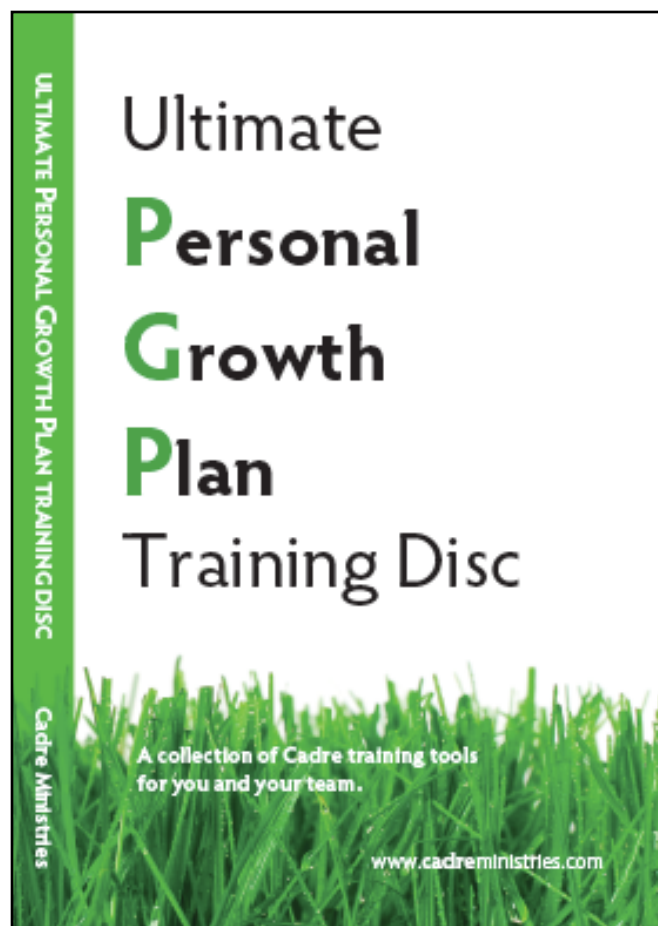
Do You Need Some Next Steps?

If you'd like some practical and biblically-based next steps on:

- How to write a personal growth plan
- How to find a personal growth partner

please keep reading...

Your Next Steps...



This *Ultimate Personal Growth Plan Training Disc* comes with one set of 25 Personal Growth Plan Cards—great for personal use and for training others to develop and follow through on a personal growth plan. The training disc is loaded with the following goodies:

- Three 30 minute audio training files on the importance of writing a PGP, how to write a SMART PGP, and how to find and be a great accountability partner.
- Two training PDFs: the importance of writing a PGP and how to create SMART goals.
- The complete PGP presentation trainer's slides for training others (Powerpoint, PDF, and Keynote)
- A two-slide training lab presentation (Powerpoint, PDF, and Keynote)
- A PDF of the Personal Growth Plan Matrix Card

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Good News for You!

Since you're still reading this, we're giving you a 25% discount (only available until 1/7/12). All you have to do is use this coupon code: `pgp2012`. It's our way of saying thanks for letting us walk alongside you as you get off the treadmill of good intentions. We'd love it if you'd tell your friends about this. *Warning: Just ordering this resource will NOT make you grow—any more than just buying a treadmill will make you lose weight. You actually have to put what you learn into action if you really want the full benefit.*