

WHAT IS MY ONE WORD?

Psalm 90:12 (NASB)

***“So teach us to number our days,
that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom.”***

I don't have enough time to live my own life!

I reached this conclusion after trying to follow the advice given on the morning “magazine” news shows one January.

It seemed like a smart way to start my day. I figured I'd tune in, get the forecast, learn the news headlines and maybe hear a celebrity interview from the latest blockbuster. I wasn't expecting all the show segments telling me how to make my life work better.

These segments offered the promise of deliverance: “Financial Freedom is Closer than You Think,” or, “Four Secrets to Better Communication.” Others I decided are designed to scare the bejebbies out of us: “Six Health Risks Every Person Faces” or, “Thieves You Cannot See – Avoiding Identity Theft.”

Motivated by a combination of fear and hope, I compiled a to-do list. A list of doable ways to improve my life and its management according to the experts. The more I listened, learned, and listed, the more behind schedule I felt.

The topics on my list ranged from health maintenance, to home maintenance, to car maintenance. I was informed I need to eat certain foods every day: 4 veggies, 3 fruits, 2 proteins (preferably chicken or fish), and I think a partridge in a pear tree. I also need to get enough fiber, calcium, Vitamin D, B, C, and Beta-something-or-other.

I need 30 minutes of cardio a day (but apparently with the right exercise product this can be done in 10), 15 minutes of strength training, and 10 minutes of stretching. Plus, some extended time for mediation so that my body and mind can align. I'm told a germ-resistant mat is needed for that.

I need to bust my stress, nurture my creativity, and improve my posture.

I need to pay attention to my finances. Save and invest. Spend frugally –yet somehow also buy all the cool gadgets they review on the show. Apparently extreme couponing is the way to afford it all – but it takes a lot of time to save 80% off your grocery bill.

I need to check my credit report regularly. Shred important documents. Back up my computer. Meet with my financial planner. And read the information that comes with our kid's (underfunded) college fund. That, by the way, is 40 pages of legal and

financial mumbo jumbo in 8 point font, single-spaced. I suppose I need to meet with my attorney to understand it.

And that creates two prerequisite tasks to add to the list: find an attorney and find a financial planner. They assume every regular Joe has a CFP, a CPA and a J.D. on speed dial. I have Domino's on mine.

The list continued.

Change my oil every 3,000 miles, and my transmission fluid every 30,000. Test my smoke detector batteries bi-annually. Change my air filters every other month. Replace my toothbrush every three months. Flip my mattress every six. Buy new pillows every three years—I think this is for my posture, but it could be to get rid of dust mites.

Check my skin for irregular moles. Check my yard for moles too. Weed and feed the lawn each spring. Grow houseplants to cleanse the air.

Save last night's roasted chicken bones to make my own chicken stock. Buy undervalued international stocks. Sell my stock before it drops. And stock my pantry for possible natural disasters.

Fertilize, amortize, winterize, maximize, scrutinize. Suddenly I realized: I don't have time to live my life!

Looking at the list of things I was supposed to do to live life my right, or well or whatever all this was going to do for me, I felt defeated. The list that was going to improve my life left me overwhelmed.

In my moment of defeat all I wanted to do was go surf. Course the list said I should put on a high SPF sunscreen and take along a BFP-free water bottle to keep me well hydrated. Filled with filtered spring water of course.

DROPPING THE BALL

I'm sure you can relate; you've made lists too. Lists of things you want to start doing or stop doing—things you want to change about yourself. Lists of ways to improve your life and your character.

Maybe you've only listed them out in your head. But I bet they come to mind each January. Nearly two-thirds of America's population has made New Year's resolutions. I have, haven't you at some point?

And you've probably found, like I've found, that each day kept blurring into the next while I tried to get a grip and make some progress with my many good intentions. Yet very little actually changed.

That ball keeps dropping in New York's Time's Square each New Year's. And we keep dropping the ball on our resolutions to improve. Only 20% of resolution makers report achieving any significant long-term change.

When I open my Bible I find more lists. Things a follower of Christ should do. Things a follower of Christ should resist doing. Traits a follower of Christ should display –all the truly important stuff that never makes it onto morning show segments.

When was I going to get to *any* of this?

I decided to drop my list of ways to get the most out of my life, and all my sweeping promises to be different. I realized I needed to find a new way to approach personal change.

LOSING THE LIST, PICKING A WORD

My first journal entry in 2004 was a single word: FLOW. Not merely written on the page, but etched in bubble letters about 3/4 of an inch tall. The letters are heavily outlined, surrounded by a thin border, and colored in gray.

It took me about 10 minutes to draw and color the word "flow." But it took 3 weeks to narrow all that was bubbling up in me down to that single word.

I'd been writing in a journal for years, but here was something I had never done before. Instead of blasting paragraphs on a page to capture my thoughts and insights, recording my steps and set-backs, I decided to meditate on just one word.

I wrote this word FLOW in response to something Jesus said. He said, "Whoever believes in me, as the Scriptures has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). That struck a nerve.

There were times when I felt the living water flowing with ease from my heart. But there were other times, more times, when it felt forced.

The idea of FLOW drew me forward. It didn't have the trappings of regret, or the pressure of sweeping promises to change like my resolutions did. It awakened something in me. Not a compulsive desire to change born out of being sick of the way I was, but a desire to live an authentic life that flowed from my relationship with Christ.

Could my life really flow from my heart? The question sent me on a search anchored by the four letters of this one word. If what Jesus said was true – pause for the obvious answer to arise - then I'd need a way to pay attention to my heart on a daily basis.

I decided looking at and concentrating on the word FLOW would remind me to do that. In the months to come I paid attention to FLOW, and to my heart and my life. I discovered I could tell the condition of my heart based on what was coming out of it into my life.

And slowly, over time with this word FLOW, I learned to reverse that process. Instead of looking at my life and actions to realize the state of my heart, I proactively addressed the condition of my heart. That changed my life.

In looking through the lens of a single chosen word, I found a new approach to personal change and spiritual formation – one that is doable, memorable, effective and sticky. The results have been greater than I expected.

A MOVEMENT RISES

In January of 2007 I challenged my church, Port City Community Church, to ditch their New Year's resolutions and each pick a word to focus on that year. I titled the series and the project "My One Word." People quickly embraced it. Within a few years, My One Word embedded itself into the DNA of our church. It's how we now approach personal change and spiritual growth.

One of the coolest things to me is how My One Word not only gives people a doable way to focus on their spiritual formation, but an easy way to talk about it. Around here you'll hear people asking each other, "What's your word?" or "How's it going with your one word?" You'll hear them answer, "My one word is ___ and so far God's been showing me ____."

Couples, family and friends all help to hold each other accountable, simply by talking about their words—around the dinner table, at small group meetings, even on Facebook.

In January 2009 the nation's most notable Christian radio station called my office. K-LOVE heard about My One Word and invited me to come on the air and tell their listeners about the project. I shared My One Word with half a million listeners that month. And I returned to the K-LOVE airways to talk about My One Word in 2010 and throughout 2011. A movement caught fire.

The movement didn't become a movement because K-LOVE called me, but because God has called each of us. This is not a move of me or my church, but a movement of God. And of His people wanting to be transformed into His image.

FOCUS IS REQUIRED

Our lives are fast-paced and demanding. Our attention is divided. The normal, natural pace of our lives will not likely lead us towards spiritual formation. We have so

many things to focus on that spiritual formation tends to fall to the wayside, along with our good intentions to rotate our mattress or wax our cars.

Most of us feel overwhelmed at the idea of embarking on a grand plan for spiritual formation like reading through the Bible in a year, or memorizing a verse every week. We'd like to but it just hasn't happened. Enter My One Word. It's easy, doable and surprisingly powerful, mainly because it supplies narrowed focus.

This book will give you a simple but effective plan to affect personal change (spiritual formation) by allowing a single word to become the lens through which you examine your heart and life for an entire year.

Your single word will force clarity and concentrate your efforts. And as you focus on your word over an extended period of time, you position yourself for God to form your character at a deep, sustainable level.

We're so busy with the surface-level things of life that we forget to number our days and tend to our hearts. We become so preoccupied with getting our lives to a manageable point or a better future that we miss both the moment, and the reality of a coming eternity.

Yet God calls us to use our days to develop a heart of wisdom. And that's what this One Word project is ultimately about.

Between these pages I'll outline how to pick a word for the year and how to focus on it. I'll discuss what you can do to drive it deep into your character, and what you can do to apply it in your life. The goal is a transformed heart.

Throughout these pages you'll see words chosen by men and women from around the nation and from all walks of life—college students, pastors, moms, recovering drug addicts. You'll hear their reasons for choosing their words and their experience with this project. I think you'll find those inspiring. And I invite you to join us this year on your own My One Word journey.

Change is possible. But focus is required. It's time to get single-minded and single-worded about your resolution to change. Are you ready? Well then, keep reading!