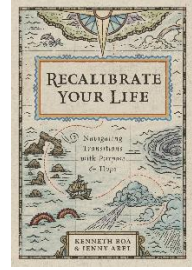


TOOL 14

Online Supplement to
Recalibrate Your Life: Navigating Transitions with Purpose and Hope



Putting Your Financial Affairs in Order¹

The currency of that which is passing away is measured by metrics of the visible, palpable, and quantifiable: metrics that are familiar and comfortable to us on this side of heaven. On the other hand, the currency of the kingdom of God is built on the only two things present in this earthly world that will endure: the Word of God and relationships.

—Kenneth Boa and Russ Crosson (in *Leverage*)²

All that we have belongs to God; He is the ultimate owner. We are simply stewards managing His possessions—investing what He has entrusted us with, for a limited time. Therefore, it's important to consult Him and His Word on how we use our money and other assets. This is especially important as we age, so that we ensure any assets we have (whether little or much) are used wisely and distributed in a manner that is pleasing to God. Regardless of the *amount* God gives us to steward, we should all aspire to pass on a spirit of grateful stewardship and generosity to the next generation.

The Exercise:

We recommend that everyone begin with step 1 in this tool, taking care to document your answers so you can revisit and revise them later. Next, proceed with the other three steps as desired/appropriate to your own situation. We encourage you to consult additional resources (such as financial advisors), viewing this tool as an overarching framework—an organized starting point. We have provided a list of suggested external resources at the end of this tool.

OVERVIEW: 4 PRACTICAL STEPS & TIMING FOR EACH

Step 1: Conduct a current financial assessment.

(Do this anytime; takes a couple of hours—with your spouse if married.)

Step 2: Develop a charitable giving strategy.

(Do this at the beginning/end of every year.)

¹ We greatly appreciate Russ Crosson's input on this tool, including content original to Ronald Blue Trust (borrowed/adapted with permission).

² Kenneth Boa and Russ Crosson, *Leverage: Using Temporal Wealth for Eternal Gain* (Atlanta: Trinity House Publishers, 2022), 28. We highly recommend [this book](#) as a wonderful complement to *Recalibrate Your Life*.

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Step 3: Make (and officialize) a will and an estate plan.

(Do this anytime, and update it when a significant life situation change occurs.)

Step 4: Hold a family conference.

(Do this after your will and estate plans are completed, when the timing is right, and preferably face to face. Consider inviting a trusted financial advisor to attend and serve as a neutral third-party facilitator.)

STEP 1: CONDUCT A CURRENT FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT

A. ASSESS

To assess your current financial situation, including your giving, ask yourself the following questions (change all pronouns to “we” if you’re completing this with a spouse). *We encourage you to jot down your answers—to these questions and to the rest of this tool—in a notebook or journal.*

- **Giving**
 - What am I giving to church and charity (formal, financial giving)?
 - Other than money, what am I spending to serve others and meet their needs (informal giving)?
 - What is my general attitude toward giving?
 - What impact does my current giving level have on my lifestyle? *(Does it have an impact?)*
 - If/as income has increased, have I increased my giving proportionately, or am I still giving the same percentage?
 - Does the Lord want me to be more generous? If so, how?
 - How am I using my money (“treasure”) to invest in the four other areas of stewardship for God’s kingdom purposes: time, talent, relationships, and truth?

- **Saving/Investing**
 - How much am I saving and investing for the future each month/year?
 - What is the purpose of these savings/investments? *Do I have a clear purpose for them?*
 - At what point will I have saved/invested “enough” such that I begin giving away any excess beyond what I need to live on? *(Keep in mind, if you don’t set a “ceiling,” it will always be a moving target.)*
 - Would I be saving/investing differently if I knew the Lord would return in twelve months? *(This question is a diagnostic tool highlighting our tendency toward presumption and control, and toward giving with a “cold hand” upon death rather than with a warm hand now.)*

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- **Spending**

- Do I have a budget so that I'm carefully stewarding my resources? Is it time to update/reevaluate this budget?

Now, pull out either your budget (if it's up to date) or your past month's bank statement to help you answer the following questions. You might even want to do a little assessment of your expenses first, categorizing and summing each category.

- Am I honoring God in how I spend? Am I spending more than I should/need?
- In what area(s) do I need to rein in (or carefully watch) my spending? *Make a plan for how to do so, and ask your spouse or someone you know well to keep you accountable.*
- Do I have any debts? Should I try to pay these off more aggressively than I'm currently doing (if in a position to do so)?

- **Family and Future**

- *For married couples:* Do my spouse and I have a shared understanding of our current financial situation? *Identify differences in viewpoint and discuss them as needed (but do not do so for so long that you get derailed from the rest of this tool!).*
- *For parents:* Have I instilled (or am I instilling) in my children a biblical worldview of money and possessions? Have I modeled (or am I modeling) that worldview for them? *If your kids are still young, you can start as soon as they're toddlers, teaching them to put any money they receive into three "coffers": Give, Save, and Spend.*
- Do I have a **will and estate plan** for my financial assets? If not, make them (see Step 3). If you have them but they're not up to date, take time to update them in the next month.
- Would it be beneficial to hold a **family conference** related to the future (including my/our estate plans)? (See Step 4.)

B. LIST ACTION ITEMS

End your assessment time by making a list of action items along with a plan for how and when to follow through on them.

STEP 2: DEVELOP A CHARITABLE GIVING STRATEGY

It is good to prayerfully consider and strategize your giving at the beginning of each year and to determine how much you will set aside (either monthly, quarterly, or yearly). Of course, no plan is set in stone, but a plan that changes is better than no plan at all. Developing a giving plan—and doing so with your spouse if you're married—is a great practice to do annually from the time you're young . . . although it's never too late to start.

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The following charitable giving grid is intended as an aid in your planning and recordkeeping as you determine worthy channels for your investments. Feel free to adapt it as desired, and keep in mind various possible giving methods (see list following the grid).

CHARITABLE GIVING GRID

Annual Giving Goal — Year: _____ / Total \$: _____

\$ ___ to local church	\$ ___ to missions and outreach (you can also give toward this priority through a dedicated fund at your church)	\$ ___ to equipping (home/family and world)	\$ ___ to support/needy
Where/when: Amount:	Where/when: Amount:	Where/when: Amount:	Where/when: Amount:
Where/when: Amount:	Where/when: Amount:	Where/when: Amount:	Where/when: Amount:
Where/when: Amount:	Where/when: Amount:	Where/when: Amount:	Where/when: Amount:

Methods of Giving:

- Cash/check/bank withdrawal
- Online with credit card (consider adding a little extra to cover the receiver's credit card processing fees)
- Gifts in kind (e.g., used home or clothing items for charities that serve the needy; diaper donations for a local crisis pregnancy center)
- Shares of stock
- Gifts of real estate
- Will/estate provisions (be sure to notify intended recipients of these, even though these kinds of gifts are "deferred"—i.e., they do not provide immediate cash)

Key Tips for Giving:

- **Do your own research.** Make sure you are very familiar with the ministries and organizations to which you give—what their missions are, how they achieve them, and that they are good stewards of donations. Good resources for assessing charities include Charity Navigator and philanthropic consultants such as Calvin Edwards & Company and Excellence in Giving. In addition, Ronald Blue Trust offers a robust set of questions for evaluating an organization or project to which you're considering giving. You can find these questions at the end of this tool (just before the Recommended Resources list).
- **Seek counsel.** Seek counsel regarding your giving—for example, from a certified financial advisor or planner.

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Guidelines for Evaluating an Organization/Project:

To help you evaluate a particular ministry Ronald Blue Trust offers the following series of questions to be asked. They are provided here with RBT's permission.

Organizational Makeup

1. History. How did it get started? Who started it? What stage of development is it in (new, older)? How is the organization creatively changing to meet the challenges of a changing world?
2. What is its purpose? Does it have a purpose statement or something that articulates why it exists?
3. How does the organization accomplish its objectives?
4. How is the ministry financed? Contributions, sales of materials, grants?
5. What are the three biggest obstacles facing the organization today (lack of people, money, personnel problems)?
6. Is it a member of the Evangelical Council of Financial Accountability (ECFA)

Financial Information

1. Get a financial statement. Are they audited?
2. How much cash does the ministry have? How much debt?
3. What is the administration charge on their people and projects (10%–15%)?
4. What percentage of expenses go toward fundraising costs?

Ministry Evaluation

1. How long has the ministry been at it?
2. Why do the ministry leaders think their strategy will work? What are the obstacles (faith barriers) that could keep their strategy from working? Do they have a plan for those obstacles?
3. What track record do they have in this strategy?
4. Do the leaders know other organizations that are doing similar things?
5. What is the vision for long-term impact?
6. What kind of reports or feedback should you expect to receive from the organization on the money invested?

Considerations for Evaluating Foreign Projects

1. How is the ministry multiplying itself?
2. How does it affect and work with the national church?
3. What does the national church think about the work of the organization?
4. How are national (in-country) believers used in the process?
5. If your people and your financial support were pulled from the project, would it continue or would it die? If it would continue, in what form?

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6. What has the track record been for previous projects like this one?
7. What is the time frame for the organization to work itself out of a job?
8. How does the work that is being done fit in with what God's Spirit is doing in the foreign country at this time?
9. How effective is their ministry work? How could it be more effective?

We are told that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1 NASB). When many of us began our careers, we were living by faith because we weren't sure how our income and expenses would balance out month to month. . . . However, as our lives moved along, many of us began to accumulate more and have a surplus of financial resources in the bank or retirement or both. As this happened, it was easy to take our focus from God and move it to our “pile” of wealth. Our security and faith slowly drifted from God to our pile. Giving now helps us return our faith and trust to God instead of trusting in the pile we have accumulated.
—Ken Boa and Russ Crosson (in *Leverage*)³

STEP 3: CREATE (& REGULARLY UPDATE) YOUR WILL & ESTATE PLAN

Most people procrastinate in the area of making a will and estate plan. Poll after poll reveals that a majority of Americans do not have a (legally valid) will. There is also a common false assumption that only the wealthy need an estate plan and will, though this is simply not the case.

A **will** simply tells what you want done with your financial assets and earthly belongings when you die—that is, what property (including financial property) you want to go to which people, in what amount/proportion, and by what method. It is *part* of an overall estate plan because it does not direct all of the assets you may own.

A comprehensive **estate plan** factors in not only assets that pass via your will but also other assets, like life insurance and retirement plans, which pass via beneficiary designation, along with other financial investments, like real estate, which could be passing via ownership (for example, a joint tenant with right of survivorship). In effect, an estate plan “covers all the bases” with respect to your end-of-life affairs. It may include but is not limited to all or some of the following:

- A will
- A health care directive
- Powers of attorney
- Beneficiary designations (e.g., for insurance policies and retirement accounts)

³ Boa and Crosson, *Leverage*, 102.

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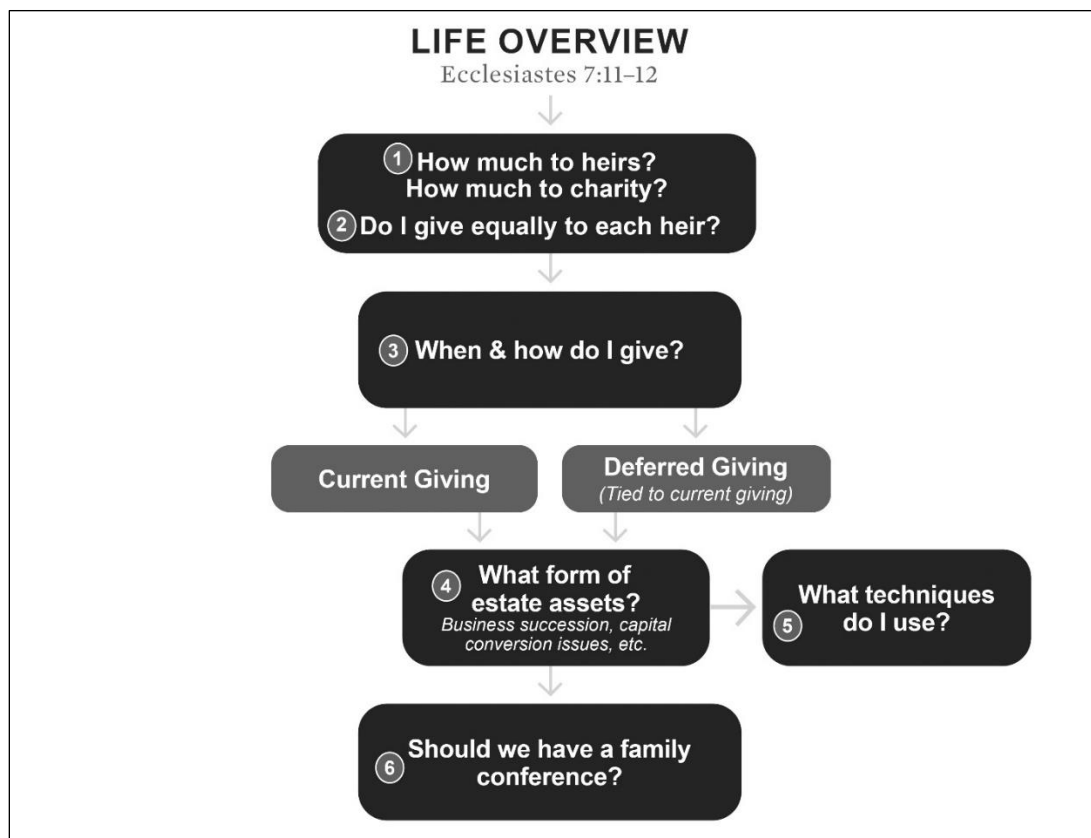
- Trusts (could include, among other types, a revocable living trust, a life insurance trust, a charitable remainder trust, a charitable lead trust, and a minor's trust)

Having a will and a larger estate plan is a matter of stewardship before God as well as a service to your loved ones (saving them time and trouble when they are grieving). Today, many resources and templates exist online to help you prepare your will and other estate plans, and we recommend you get a will in place at the very least, knowing you can always amend and enhance it later. As helpful as online resources are, we highly recommend you consult a certified financial advisor and, of course, eventually an attorney to make your plans official and legal.

Although we are not covering estate planning or wills comprehensively, we are providing a brief outline for a process to help you in decision-making and get you moving in the right direction.

THE ESTATE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The estate decision-making process can be broken into six decisions. Answering these questions in the order shown in the diagram below will simplify your estate plan.⁴



⁴ This chart used with permission from Ronald Blue Trust.

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STEP 4: HOLD A FAMILY CONFERENCE

Russ Crosson and his colleagues at Ronald Blue Trust offer a wonderful template and guidance for holding a family conference that will foster intergenerational dialogue and allow you to communicate your values, wishes, and plans as they relate to your estate as well as your overall legacy.

The Basics of a Family Conference

WHY: A forum for intergenerational communication and dialogue, to pass on values to the next generations. The conference should focus on the continued development of a godly posterity. Promote the idea that money is a tool God gives us to promote family unity, mutual encouragement, and Christ-centered relationships. [Ecclesiastes 7:11–12](#) is a great passage to set the tone and goal of the family conference; these verses relate to the attainment of wisdom as a primary concern over the attainment of wealth. Technical issues should take a backseat at these meetings. The conference should foster better understanding within your family of core values and motivation behind stewardship decisions; the outcome of the meeting should be a greater sense of family harmony, legacy, and common purpose (this outcome, of course, is more easily attained in a family in which most or all are believers).

WHO: Invite all children 18 and older, plus their spouses (if appropriate). Consider inviting family members via a personal letter (see template below). Also, since each family's dynamics are different, so you should adjust your plan based on what is wise for your situation. (Sometimes individual conversations in advance of a larger gathering are helpful.)

WHEN: Hold such a conference when . . .

- All children become adults (18 or older)
- You complete your estate plan
- There is a major change (in your estate plan, in your life circumstance—e.g., upon retirement, or in your family business)
- You're preparing to make a major charitable gift(s) or major financial gifts to your children
- There is any topic that would benefit from family discussion
- Approximately every 3–5 years

WHAT: A sample agenda is provided below. Topics at the conference may include:

- Financial education for the children (and possibly also grandchildren)
- Explanation of your current estate plan, charitable giving plans, and/or plans for the family business (if there is one)
- Intentional sharing of personal and stewardship values

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WHERE: It's usually best to choose a neutral location, such as a conference room at a hotel or business, although your home can be okay too. (If you hold this conference during a family vacation, be sure to explain it as something separate and focused.)

HOW: We recommend you invite a mediator to facilitate your intergenerational dialogue. (Ronald Blue Trust offers this service, but many other financial advisors can provide similar assistance.) The facilitator will prepare the agenda and flow of the meeting ahead of time (in consultation with you). Send out a formal invitation well ahead of time, clearly delineating the meeting's purpose and setting its date and location (see sample below).

Sample Agenda for a Family Conference

- Purpose of meeting
- Communication of values
- Overview of the estate decision-making process (see Step 3 for guidance)
- Current estate plan
- Challenges, questions, and feedback
- Action steps (e.g., implementation of wills, trusts, and gifting plans; also, dates/plans for future discussions)

Sample Invitation to a Family Conference

This adapted sample is provided courtesy of Russ Crosson.

Dear Children,

There have been few times in life that I have written you letters, and as far as I can remember (a problem with age), I have never written a letter to all of you at once. Therefore, understand the importance of the issues I am writing about.

I am asking each of you to make yourself available for an evening on [DATE OF FAMILY CONFERENCE] for dinner and a meeting with all of our family and [INSERT NAME OF MEDIATOR IF ONE WILL BE PRESENT]. Time has passed quickly in our lives, and although I still think of you as my children (and always will), you have reached the age of adulthood and must deal with life at a different level.

As a result of God's sovereign plan, each of you has one thing in common—the [LAST NAME OF YOUR FAMILY] name. By virtue of being a [FAMILY NAME], you have enjoyed certain privileges, benefits, and opportunities in life that have been a result of God's special blessing on our family. In addition, the [FAMILY NAME] carries a certain amount of expectation, responsibility, and accountability. As we all traveled to the birthplace of my parents (your grandparents) to reflect on our heritage, it was a reminder

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of the responsibility that has been placed on us as a result of the stewardship and legacy of those who have gone before.

The meeting on [DATE OF FAMILY CONFERENCE], will begin to explore issues beyond basic financial management. We will talk about the [FAMILY NAME] estate, the role of the family business,⁵ and how your life will be impacted as the future unfolds. While we want you to follow the plan God has for you, we want you prepared for some inevitable consequences that will result because of who you are and the family you are in.

Your mother and I are proud of each of you and are honored that God chose us to be your parents. Thank you for allowing us the privilege of also being a friend and counselor. We look forward to spending this special evening with you.

Love,
Dad

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- Ronald Blue Trust (www.ronblue.com)
- Crown Financial Ministries (www.crown.org)
- Kingdom Advisors (<http://kingdomadvisors.com>)
- National Association of Christian Financial Consultants (<https://nacfc.org>)
- National Christian Foundation (www.ncfgiving.com)

⁵ Applicable only if you own a business.