

LifeLines

Live your reality



- A trellis for the branches of the vine
- A workout programme for spiritual fitness

Potbound? Move from being a bonsai believer to a fruitful branch on the vine of God.



A lifeline is something that saves you; LifeLines are an invitation to live your life in Christ more positively. You are already part of Christ's body; you have already set your feet on a path that leads to holiness and the kingdom of God. What's the next step?

LifeLines

- ▶ can be guideLines, suggestions for how to go.
- ▶ can be ledger Lines, a place to be accountable in detail for how you spend your life.
- ▶ can be plumb Lines, making sure the house you're building isn't wonky because it's built on sand.
- ▶ can be ledger Lines in the musical sense, a way to sing your own personal descant to the tune the Church is singing.
- ▶ can be railway Lines to get you quickly to your destination.
- ▶ can be bloodLines, linking you through time and space with the rest of the Body of Christ.
- ▶ can be trellis Lines, making sure the vine grows in the way that will give most fruit.
- ▶ can be track Lines, showing those who are running the race and keeping the faith the way to the prize of eternal life.
- ▶ can be laughter Lines, the signs of a fulfilled and happy disciple.
- ▶ are LifeLines because they encourage and stretch you in the way that is life, the way of Jesus Christ.

LifeLines are a way of looking at your present reality and comparing it with where you want to end up. They are a way of training smarter, not harder, so the effort you put into opening up to God's grace, through prayer, scripture and sacrament, results in a change you can see and rejoice in. LifeLines are a way of making sure you don't miss out what's obvious to everyone else, as you work on your failings and pray for the Holy Spirit to blow through your heart. **In ten steps, you can look at the areas of your life and decide where you want to focus your attention for the moment.** Use the same ten steps to find things to give thanks for and notice where God has already done great things in your life.



How are the different areas of your life weighted? Where are your blind spots? Where do you need to be stretched? Where is God inviting you to next?

1. Personal prayer
2. Simplicity of life
3. Christian service
4. Looking after myself
5. Bible reading

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c Caroline / flickr

6. Worshipping together
7. Family and friends
8. Self-discipline
9. Receiving Holy Communion
10. Study

accountability

c John Snyder/ Wiki

Before you begin, remind yourself that God loves you as his precious child. The questions in this booklet are not judging or criticising you; they are intended as an encouragement to explore who you really are in God, so that you are drawn onward by love and grace, rather than being driven by guilt. God has given you this one precious life in which to explore a relationship with him; he has made you as a unique manifestation of his goodness, and he wants you to be the best 'you' you can be. In the book of Revelation, Christ speaks of the white stone in heaven, on which each of us has a new name written that only Christ knows (Rev 2.17). We are each called to become the person God calls us to be, and to co-operate with his grace, to let God shape us into that new identity hidden in him.

The process of looking at your life and holding yourself accountable should not feel like squeezing yourself into a one-size-fits-all mould. Instead, see it as an invitation to be **flexible**: to commit for a while to what works for now, and to change it when you need to change it. If you want to change your practice as a result of some of the questions, it's a good idea to **start small**. In a gym you would increase the weights and the repetitions as you get fitter; the same can be true of your prayer life and your offering of time.

- **Do what works for you**, not what you see your neighbour doing.
- **Go at the pace that feels right**: what's important is not the absolute amount of results that you produce (e.g. so many hours of prayer), but the fact that you are in a process of change, and not standing still.
- Be **encouraged** to try new things.
- If life is tough, **go easy** on yourself.
- If life is OK, it might be time to **stretch yourself** some more.

Overleaf are some comments on the ten LifeLines suggested here for you to consider, in no particular order. You may already know where you want to invest your energy first; but pray too and allow God to surprise you.

The aim of it all is to draw closer to God, to love him more and to be stretched in your capacity to receive his love.

1. Personal prayer

Talking and listening to God, every day of my life. A daily office may be right. A retreat every year if I can.

Do I spend time which is just time with God every day? It doesn't have to be long, though it can be, but it needs to be time that is just for God. Talking to God while walking the dog is good too, but as an addition. What type of daily prayer is right for me? It might be a set form of words like Common Worship Daily Prayer; or it might be a 'Quiet time' with some Bible study and some intercessory prayer. Personality type, your preferred style of worship and the amount of time you have available will all play their part in your choice. The booklet *Toolbox for Prayer* offers more suggestions.

2. Simplicity of life

I show Jesus my spending, my lifestyle, my giving. I accept having less for his sake.

This is where you show Jesus that you want him to be Lord of your finances and not just your feelings. Giving hurts a lot less if you're comfortably off than if you can barely scrape through to the end of the month; remember the story of the poor widow and the two copper coins. You are the only one who can say what is appropriate to your current circumstances; but as a rule of thumb, if your faith is making no difference at all to your lifestyle, you could probably do more.

What makes a well-rounded Christian disciple? Some will put a big emphasis on service, others on study, others on prayer. But we all need Jesus to reign in our bank accounts and our diaries as well as in our hearts.

Driving yourself to exhaustion is not a good response to God's call, and neither is carrying on as if God hadn't called at all.

Think of a gym with ten exercise machines around it: some will be favourites that we automatically gravitate to, but we all need to use all of the machines in order to be fit, and not gym freaks with lopsided development.

3. Christian service

How do I share God's love with others? What gifts do I hold in trust for them? Does it make a difference that I am a Christian?

It doesn't have to have a Christian label to count as the service you offer for Christ's sake; and it can be something you enjoy doing too! For example, you don't have to force yourself to lead Sunday School if you are uncomfortable with children. Whatever you do, what's important is the attitude with which you do it. If you're doing it for the love of God, it will show, and it will be infectious.

4. Looking after myself

Proper exercise and rest are the foundation of my prayer life and being a whole person in God's presence.

Burnout is shockingly common, both among clergy and among Christian volunteers, because people seem to think they can't ever take time for themselves. Jesus made his disciples come away and rest for a while, so we can too. We'll be much more productive when we come back, but that's not the point; we will also be happier and our prayer life will be much more fruitful if we allow ourselves rest, proper exercise and some fun too.

5. Bible reading

Daily at least a few verses.

Some people prefer to read the Bible at a different time from their prayer slot. But whether it's part of our prayer routine or not, each Christian needs to soak themselves in the word of God. Gradually, without your noticing it, the words of scripture will form your attitudes and be incorporated into who you are. If you're going to start Bible reading for the first time, it's important to begin with Jesus, that is the New Testament, rather than wading through lots of incomprehensible Old Testament stuff. That can come later; and study notes or commentaries can be a great help. There are two ways of approaching this daily Bible reading: some people like to have a daily Bible study and actively use their thinking mind. Other people prefer to have their study time less often, and let the scripture text just soak gently into their hearts, receiving it without analysing it. This is a slower way of getting familiar with the Bible than study, but has its own value.

6. Worshipping together

Sunday church is a priority.

A generation ago it would be taken for granted that you went to church every Sunday, and serious Christians would probably go twice. Each person's circumstances are different, but it's still worth taking a look at how important church is to you compared with the other things that are competing for the Sunday-morning slot. If you absolutely can't get to your normal church service, could you go to an eight o'clock instead, or an evening service? If your own church doesn't offer it, is there another you could go to?

You may find that your personal prayer life is thin simply because you've been running on empty and not getting enough church.

7. Family and friends

I need to take time to be with those who nurture and support me, and to do the same to them.

Some people neglect their own needs, perhaps because they feel guilty about enjoying anything. Often they don't realise that they are also neglecting the needs of those who share their life. Also, it's often not until a long way down the line that we realise we have become anxious, or depressed, because we haven't spent time with our friends. People will stop ringing if you're never home to talk to them; but friendships mean taking on responsibility for our friends' well-being too.

8. Self-discipline

Am I self-indulgent? Am I keeping to my LifeLines commitments? Have I sinned recently? Confession may be appropriate. Reconciliation with others may be necessary.

Some people are already discipline freaks, while others hate the very thought. But for all of us, it's essential to look at whether we need to ask forgiveness for something, and whether our behaviour is what it ought to be. For overanxious and scrupulous people who use this as an excuse to drive themselves into the ground, this can be an invitation to learn the discipline of being kind to themselves.

9. Receiving Holy Communion

I commit to receiving it regularly and with proper preparation. Through it I am made one with Christ in a profound way.

At the high end of the churchmanship spectrum, this in theory goes without saying. At the lower end, you may need more convincing that communion is essential. But Christians of every shade can be guilty of receiving communion mechanically, without preparing their heart for an encounter with the Lord. And whatever you believe does or doesn't happen at Communion, it is our Lord's command to 'do this' in memory of him. Communion is something we *do*, not something we think about, and so it forms our discipleship in a different way to things we engage with intellectually, like sermons.

If you're of a 'lower' persuasion, you won't feel the need to receive as often, but it should still be regularly. A faith that is without the sacrament runs the risk of staying stuck in the head, or being just emotional froth, in any shade of churchmanship. Simply coming and acknowledging your need of Christ, and putting out your hands humbly and receiving the bread and wine into this body of yours that God has made, does something which you can't get through your head or your heart; it brings the lordship of Christ into your ordinary bodily life.

10. Study

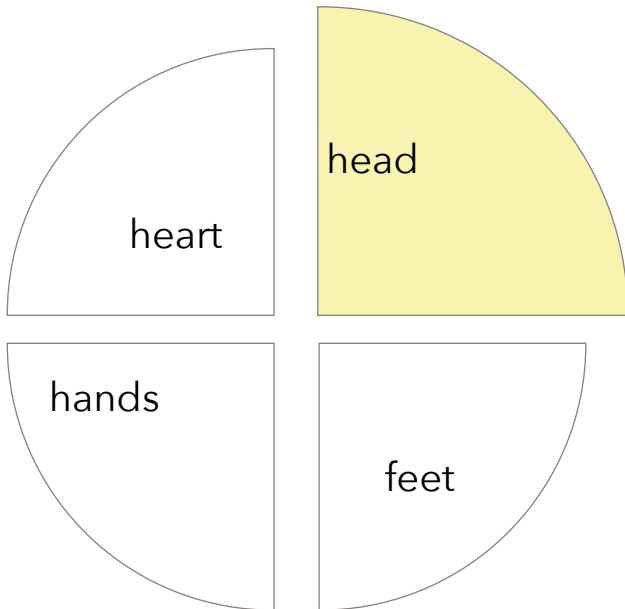
The Bible. Ethics, doctrine, spirituality. I grow to understand more of God's ways with his creation and what it means for me.

Every Christian needs to study the faith in a way that is appropriate to them. If you want your faith to have any relation to your life, you need to keep it nourished. There are all sorts of ways of doing this: study courses, small groups, personal reading, or even appropriate TV shows, or radio programmes like *The Moral Maze*. You can choose whatever interests you at the moment: you might want to study the Bible in depth, or you might want to find out about medical ethics or just war theory, or you might want to learn more about spirituality, different styles of approaching God. You could sign up to a two-year study course, or just go to a one-off talk at church. What's important is that you have something on the go at any given time.

bal ance

head - Could be pondering theological truths, or having a view on euthanasia or migrants.

heart - Could be ecstatic worship, or tea and sympathy.



hands - Could be volunteering, or bringing up your kids.

feet - Could be running, dancing, gardening: whatever puts you on a firm foundation and gives you energy for your life in God's presence.

Where is your home base? What is easy for you?

Where don't you feel so at home?

How can you find the right balance so that you receive as well as giving?

abundant life

What is Jesus inviting you to be and do?

'Rejoice in the
Lord always'

My LifeLines

In this space you can make notes for a commitment that you want to make in each of the ten areas. How long do you want to commit for? How will you review it at the end, to see if anything needs changing? Perhaps you have a small group where you can be accountable to each other, or perhaps a spiritual director who can help you review.

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live | pray | serve

