



Using *“The Intentional Year”* Plan

What is the Intentional Year plan?

It's a simple plan that provides a structured process for couples in distress to work on their marriages with support and accountability.

Who is it for?

Any couple who is considering ending their Blessing, or who finds themselves stuck or in a very challenging situation.

For the past four years all couples who attend our level 2 Blessing workshops are introduced to the Intentional Year Plan and asked to sign a form stating that they will commit to investing a year of supported effort before making the decision to end their Blessing. The signed form is included in their application for Blessing.

The Introduction to the Intentional (I-Deal) Year

Any relationship between a man and woman, no matter how loving, committed and deep it may be, will face challenges and difficulties. God designed men and women as complementary opposites; we love differently, and experience love differently. Of course, the best way to maintain a strong marriage is to live a healthy spiritual life as part of a supportive community. But it is normal and natural for any relationship to face times of crisis.

When such painful times arise, the strength of your eternal commitment is of course important. However when you feel overwhelmed, it is smart and healthy to get help. If you cannot find the way to resolve your struggle, it is not acceptable to simply withdraw and avoid, drift into non-communication or seek comfort in unhealthy ways. It is important to report your situation honestly, not only to a friend, but also to a trusted mentor, counselor, or your local pastor. The Blessing & Family Ministry is committed to providing your local pastor and ministry team the support and guidance that can help them assist you, confidentially and professionally.

The Intentional (I-Deal) Year is a commitment to invest at least one year in a guided and supported process to heal and renew. This is a minimum requirement for any Blessed Couple, before concluding that your marriage has no future.

By signing this form, your couple is making the following promises:

- We promise to maintain an eternal commitment to our Blessing.
- We promise to report to our local pastor, or local BFM Coordinator, if troubles arise.
- We promise to invest in our Intentional (I-Deal) Year before making any final decision about ending our Blessing.

Groom's Name [Print]

Groom's Signature

Bride's Name [Print]

Bride's Signature

Date _____

Your job is to help them try some new things and to help them stick to their goals

Most couples who will come to you will feel as though they have tried everything! But they haven't. It's just that we are fairly uncreative about our relationships. We do what we have learned to do, or seen others do, or are comfortable doing. All of these are limiting. Your job is to help them try some new things and to help them stick to their goals. They will do the work, and you will support them and offer structure and accountability. See yourself as a mediator, not a counselor.

It's normal to struggle

A large part of your job is to 'normalize' their struggle for them. Remind them that it is normal to struggle at different times in a long-term marriage, and that often it is the working through the struggle that allows couples to mature and go deeper. Dealing with the challenges that come up is part of how couples develop their emotional intimacy and strengthen their love for each other. It is not just about staying together for the sake of the kids', or because they're 'supposed to', or because the Principle says.

Statistics are very hopeful

It can also be empowering for them to hear that the statistics are very hopeful: "When people stay together instead of breaking up, the great majority of them get to the other side of their struggle and become happy in their marriages."

Recently researchers surveyed couples about the happiness of their marriages over a period of five years. Eighty-five percent of the couples who originally reported being in either an "unhappy marriage" or a "very unhappy marriage," that stayed in the relationship, five years later reported being either "happy" or "very happy".

Now that is secular research, so when we add the power of the Principle and God into the mix, the odds of success and happiness are even greater.

Desired Outcomes

- Each partner can recognize and own their contribution to the problem
- They can make this important decision with more information
- If it ends, both partners can feel that they made their best effort
- If it ends, there can be closure so that each person can move on in a healthy, productive way, (and hopefully get re-blessed).
- If it ends and there are children involved, there is a minimum of respect and sincerity in the relationship as parents.
- If it continues, there will be clearer goals and better communication.

Your job

- Help them to help themselves, to get 'unstuck'.
- Help them to be accountable to themselves and each other.
- Help them to make clear, achievable goals that can be evaluated and adjusted monthly.
- Help them to get any professional resources they might need before or during the process.

Things to Watch Out For

- This is not counseling.
- Try not to take sides! Beware of your personal feelings and concepts.
- Assume that they have made a lot of effort in their own ways, even if you can't see it or recognize it.
- They might expect you to 'fix it' for them.
- Believe in them; in their integrity and faith and potential.
- Remember this is their decision!

The Intentional Year Plan is designed to make it easy for you, as the mentor, and the couple, to discuss and make goals and changes in important areas.

Your First Meeting

Have them fill out page one of The Intentional Year

INTENTIONAL YEAR PLAN
Blessing & Family Ministry, FFWPU - USA

Local Pastor's Name _____ Church Location _____ Date _____
 BFM Rep/Mentor's Name _____ Position _____ Email _____ Phone _____
 Couple's Blessing Date _____ Location _____

Husband	Wife
(print) Name (Last, First, MI): _____	(print) Name (Last, First, MI): _____
Phone (H): _____ (C): _____	Phone (H): _____ (C): _____
Email: _____	Email: _____
Address: _____	Address: _____
Is this your first Blessing? Yes No	Is this your first Blessing? Yes No
If "No" Explain: _____	If "No" Explain: _____

	#	Name	Age	Gender
Children	1.			
	2.			
	3.			
	4.			
	5.			
	6.			

Ask each spouse to explain the situation from their perspective in 10 minutes. Their partner cannot interrupt.

It can be helpful for everyone involved if there are some perimeters and guidelines to follow:

- No blaming or criticizing
- No name-calling or yelling
- Aim for understanding and respect
- Confidentiality

“One In and One Out” Syndrome

Ideally, couples would come for help before they reach this stage. But we know that this doesn't always happen. Statistically, people wait until their marriages are completely on the rocks, or until one partner says they've had enough. Then we are faced with the “one in and one out syndrome”. It is the most challenging dynamic to work with, and unfortunately, the most common. Don't make the mistake of assuming that the person who wants to keep the Blessing is the more faithful person and vice versa. Both are to blame and it is never as simple as it appears.

Be non-judgmental. Explain that you want to help the couple make their best effort, and if need be, help them to end their Blessing with understanding, honesty, and in the healthiest way, so that both can have confidence to move on, and eventually get re-matched and re-Blessed.

This is especially important with second generation couples. Many people feel like failures when their Blessing ends, and lose hope for the future. And many second generation get so discouraged, that they back away from the church and lose confidence in the matching process. Therefore it is crucial to listen attentively to each person with respect. They already feel bad, so they don't need us to make them feel worse.

Page 2: What Have You Already Done?

Now have them fill out page two

INTENTIONAL YEAR PLAN
Blessing & Family Ministry, FFWPU - USA

What Are You Already Doing?	
Critical Issues (infidelity, abuse, mental health, addiction, etc.) (support groups, 12-step groups, online support, professional, medical or psychological counseling etc.)	H
	W
Spiritual Conditions	H
	W
Marriage Counseling (pastoral or professional)	H
	W
Marriage Education and Enrichment (seminars, retreats, online education, reading, etc.)	H
	W
Family Support or Counseling (if needed)	H
	W
Other	H
	W

Our attitude

It is important that the couple feels that you really understand their situation and the efforts they have made to improve it. It is crucial that we express sympathy and respect and don't try to downplay their experience.

- I appreciate all the effort you have made / how discouraged you must be feeling
- I respect how hard it must be for you to reach out

This is very helpful, as it helps you as the mentor to see what they have already tried and what they haven't, and allows them to review with you what attempts they've made and how successful they were or weren't.

- 1. Addressing Critical Issues:** Addiction, mental or physical illness, children, faith, affairs, pornography etc.
- 2. Spiritual Life and Spiritual Education (DP, Cheong Pyeong)**
- 3. Marriage Counseling (pastoral or professional)**
- 4. Marriage Education and Enrichment**
- 5. Family Counseling**
- 6. Other**

1. Critical Issues

If there is a critical issue, such as abuse, or mental illness, this needs to be addressed first. This is often where our brothers and sisters need help finding professional resources, or even the desire or recognition needed to seek out the help needed.

Do either of you or any of your children have critical addictions or problems such as infidelity, abuse, mental health, addiction, etc.? If so, what attempts have been made to solve or deal with these issues? Have you attended or tried support groups, 12step groups, online support, professional, medical or psychological counseling etc. If not, why not? (no insurance, financial problems, illegal, language barriers etc.) If so, what progress has been made?

A word about domestic violence

If there is any concern for the safety of a spouse or children, know that this is beyond our skill set and help them get immediate support. This may require asking a spouse to leave until a program is in place for them to attend. Have a local domestic hotline number readily available. It is *never* okay for someone to hit someone else!

A difficult life event can cause strain

Certain life events can place a lot of stress on couples and families. They include: getting married, losing a job, the death of a family member or someone close, a serious illness or disability, the birth of a child, depression or another mental health issue, a natural disaster, children leaving home, addiction, and a crisis with one of your children.

The changes to a couple's daily routine that these events necessitate, not to mention the emotional distress they cause, can spark dissatisfaction, dysfunction, and conflict. Many times, couples seek help while experiencing one or more of these common life events, or soon after.

Sometimes people have tried a lot of things but didn't have accountability or a cheering squad to keep them going. Some people have tried very little, but suffered greatly due to a life-altering event or an on-going challenge.

Assume they actually know what they should do - they just need help doing it!

If there is a critical issue, start with that. Is there any way you can approach this problem as a team? Your problem is my problem. Dealing with a critical issue may require that one spouse gets specific, professional help. If this is the case, what can their partner do (and not do) to support the process? Sometimes it is helpful for the partner to take themselves out of the mentoring role, and let someone else, a professional, be the accountability partner.

For example, if a spouse needs to attend AA meetings or has a serious problem with pornography, they would need a mentor who isn't their spouse. And their partner may need a mentor to support them while they are trying to support their partner. They may need to stop asking their partner how things are going,

and leave that to another person, and that could be very difficult to learn.

After there is a plan in place to deal with the critical issue, then you can go through the rest of the list together – what might be helpful for you? Some areas might appeal to one person but not the other – that is okay. They can make individual goals as well as goals together.

2. Spiritual Life and Education

How is your spiritual life? What do you do personally for spiritual nourishment? As a couple? Have you made any spiritual conditions? What resulted from them? Did you attend a DP workshop, or CP workshop? Was it helpful

3. Marriage Counseling

Have you had any marriage counseling? If so, from whom? Was it pastoral? (pastor or BFM representative). Was it professional? Was it helpful? In what ways was it helpful, and in what ways was it not? How long did you have counseling? Was it together or individually?

4. Marriage Education and Enrichment

Have you read any books on marriage? Have you attended a marriage workshop or seminar? Was it church-run or not? Did you attend together? What were the results? Have you watched any webinars on-line? Were they helpful?

5. Family Support and/or Counseling

If there are children involved, ask them how they think their children are coping with the distress in their couple. Are there any signs of stress? If so, what are they and what have they tried to do to help their children? (Pastoral or professional counseling, individual counseling, family counseling, help at school, etc.)

6. Other

Often, people in distress have sought out individual counseling or support of some kind; like spiritual readings, or other types of emotional, spiritual or physical healings. Find out about these, and appreciate them. Ask if there was progress made.

***Don't meet with them for more than an hour
(an hour and a half at most.)***

You need enough time to make a connection with them, to hear their story and their prior efforts, and that is often enough for the first meeting. Sometimes they will be so excited to have someone listen to them, they will be tempted to go on and on. And sometimes you may feel so bad for them and sympathetic, that will find it hard to end your time with them. **Structure, parameters, and small pieces are more likely to be effective than 5 hour-long sessions.**

Depending on their situation, on how distressed or overwhelmed they are, help them make a goal in one of these areas to begin with. Unless there is a critical situation that requires professional help, ask the couple where they think they should or could begin. This helps them drive the process, and have ownership over the goal-making and structure. Also, we want them to have a sense of accomplishment and victory.

Always send them home with hope and homework!

Second Meeting - One Week Later

How was your week? What came up? Did you do your homework? What did you learn?

Go Over Their Daily Schedule With Them

It can be very revealing for couples when they go through their daily schedule, to discover how little time they spend together or with their children. Do that with them, and make sure to cover the weekend schedule as well. Help them see where small changes could be made and help them make those small changes by crafting clear, specific goals. “I will spend five minutes every night talking with my teenager,” I will stop whatever I am doing and greet you when you come home from work. Or, “We will have a cup of coffee together after dinner, before we turn the TV on, or before you go on the computer.”

Now have them fill out page three

INTENTIONAL YEAR PLAN
Blessing & Family Ministry, FFWPU - USA

DAILY SCHEDULE - HUSBAND AND WIFE - Option 3 (3 Hour Increments)											
For example: HDH, Prayer, Bedtime, Mealtimes, Couple/Family Time, Work, School, Church Activities											
	6 - 9	9 - 12	12 - 3	3 - 6	6 - 9	9 - 12					
M	H										
	W										
T	H										
	W										
W	H										
	W										
Th	H										
	W										
F	H										
	W										
S	H										
	W										
Su	H										
	W										

Ver: March 16, 2016 Keep original at local church, provide one copy to each individual.

Help Them Improve Their Time Management and Balance

Many conflicts arise around how much time couples spend in other activities: at work, at school, on the internet, volunteering, doing church work. Going through each person's schedule helps them to see where they could make small changes that could mean a lot to their spouse. For example, if they spend all evening (3-4 hours) on their computer, perhaps they could commit to spending less time for the first week.

Stephen Covey, in his book "Seven Habits", explains that often we confuse time management with self-management. He believes that we will 'make time for what we believe is important. In other words, if we don't have time for our spouses and/or children, it is not a failure of 'time management necessarily, but more likely a reflection of what we value or don't value.

Investing Intentionally in Our Marriage and Making Small Goals for Improvement

Help them realize the importance of actively protecting and supporting their marriage. Then they can begin to see what things they are doing or not doing that can contribute to creating a successful environment for growth and change in their relationship.

Investing Intentionally in Our Marriage and Making Small Goals for Improvement

and now have them fill out page four

INTENTIONAL YEAR PLAN
Blessing & Family Ministry, FFWPU - USA

Intentionally Investing into Our Marriage And making small goals for improvement	
Couple Time (at home)	Both:
Date Night (outside)	Both: Babysitter:
Mentor/Supportive Couple/Double Dates	H
	W
Personal Interest Groups	H
	W
Sunday Service/Church Activities	H
	W
Family Time (for parents only)	Both:
Workplace/School	H
	W
Internet/Video Games/Phone Use	H
	W
Serving Others	H
	W

Ver: March 16, 2016 Keep original at local church, provide one copy to each individual.

Go Through the List Together

As you go through the list with them, they will probably start to see where they need to put effort. Ask them if they feel inclined to make personal or spiritual goals of their own in any of the areas. Do they want to address an issue that is problematic by putting it into a practical goal? An example of this might be a couple where one person goes to bed early and the other stays up late. Perhaps they could make a goal to pray together before the early sleeper goes to bed, or perhaps they can go to bed together for a snuggle, and then the night owl can get up and continue their activities.

- **Date Night Schedule:** Do they ever go on dates? If not, that is also a good place to begin. Implementing a special time each week where they focus on each other, can change their entire dynamic. It does not have to cost money. Even going out for a cup of coffee, or going for a walk together can be enough to re-energize things
- **Mentor Couples and Supportive Couples:** If things are extremely tense between them, suggest they go on a double date with another UC couple. That can offer a lot of support and ease the tension. If there is a mentoring system set up in your community, connect them to a mentor couple. If there isn't – start one!
- **Small Groups/Interest Groups:** Plug them into a small group or a hobby group that already exists, or help them to begin one. Community is the best antidote for isolation.
- **Sunday Service and Church Activities:**

Spiritual and emotional isolation is very common and can have serious repercussions on all aspects of our personal and family lives. Do they attend church? If not, why not? Do they work on Sundays, or do they need a ride? Are their children in Sunday School or attending youth group? Where are they getting spiritual support, if any?

Are either of them connected to the local church in other ways? For example, attending Kodan meetings, working at a church business, volunteering in some way, or participating in a small group? Once you and the couple have discussed this topic, help them to find small ways to improve their spiritual lives and support systems.

Different Spiritual Styles

Often while discussing a couple's involvement in church activities, a difference in spiritual styles between them will emerge as one of the causes of the overall feeling of disconnection or lack of involvement. For example, "He never wants to come to church with me", or "She is always at meetings and neglects my needs and the needs of the children". Different spiritual styles can often get exaggerated over time, until couples cannot relate to each other's ways at all, and begin instead to criticize and judge each other for their differences. Be prepared for this and help them find small compromises and places of commonality. A shared way to express their faith can be a strong bonding activity.

Remind them that there are many ways to worship God and express our faith, that some are more accepted by our church but that that doesn't mean they are necessarily better. Help them develop respect for each other in this area. Perhaps have them do a Faith Survey or read about the many different "God Languages". Suggest compromise and help them to make small requests of each other. For example, "Could you come to Sunday Service with me once a month? That would really help me to feel supported". Or, "Could you aim to have one free evening a week without a meeting so that we can spend time together as a couple (or as a family)?"

What if faith is the critical issue facing the couple?

For example, if one spouse has joined a separate branch or sect of our movement, or if one has become an atheist? This situation requires careful support. Help the couple to discuss and focus on their core values, on what really matters to them. Help them to see where those core values intersect and to strengthen those areas. Build on what they have in common, what we put our energy into is what grows. A couple may have to decide what their priority is – joining their partner's faith or separating from their family. This is an excruciating decision for anyone to make – and remember, it is theirs to make! Support them without preaching and taking sides.

Commitment really matters

Commitment is one of the strongest adhesives couples have to keep their marriage together, but it needs to be nurtured and demonstrated on a regular basis.

There are actually two types of commitment in marriage

One is personal dedication and the other is constraint commitment.

Personal dedication is about a promise a couple makes to each other to maintain and improve their relationship for the mutual benefit of each partner. It requires investment and sacrifice and seeking to meet the needs of your partner. When a couple feels a strong sense of 'we', work together as a team, and invest in their relationship, this can really help them through difficult times.

Constraint commitment refers to the internal and external forces that contribute to making a marriage stable. Common factors that restrain couples are things like social pressure from friends or family, concern for children, alternatives to marriage like living alone or having less money, and moral or religious beliefs that divorce is wrong and will make God unhappy. Interestingly, the higher the number of constraints, the more likely that a partner will choose to stay in a marriage, even if personal dedication decreases.

Many couples who are in crisis, are being held together by constraints, and the personal dedication to each other and their relationship has eroded. We can assist couples in this situation by helping them to make small investments in their relationships and doing intentional actions to make their partners happy.

This area can be particularly important with younger couples if they do not yet have ownership of their faith, clarity around their core values, or haven't started having children yet. They have fewer constraints in place, so they tend to focus on the quality of the relationship and how happy they are in it.

Physical separation can add to the stress of any marriage. Perhaps one partner has to be away often for work, or one is still in school and needs to do a study abroad semester. This would be difficult for any couple, but where they are in crisis, it becomes particularly important to help them decide on clear goals, boundaries and action steps. Without these, there may not be enough emotional security in the marriage, which can lead to unhealthy choices and decisions.

- **Workplace:** How many hours a day is each person at work or away from home? Who do they spend their time with at work? Are their relation-

ships with co-workers healthy or not? Can any changes be made here that might help?

- **School:** Many of our younger couples are still in school when they start their married lives together and some of our older couples go back to school in their later years. This can add extra strain on a marriage. Ask questions about time away and time spent studying, and what kinds of interactions are occurring at school. Are they healthy or not?
- **Internet/TV/Video Games:** How much time do the individuals involved spend on these things? Is it interrupting or invading their time as a couple or with family? If so, where can changes be made?
- **Serving Others:** Often when couples or families are in distress, they shrink into themselves and stop giving. Their emotional needs feel overwhelming and they become selfish in order to survive. However, we know that when we give, we feel better, and we open a way for God to work in us. Perhaps they can find a small way to contribute something at Sunday Service or in service to someone outside their family. They can make the coffee for everyone, or they can help put away the chairs. Little things can and do make a big difference.

Again, always send them home with hope and homework!

Time to set up monthly meetings

After your first two meetings with a couple, they should be clear about their goals and commitments. Set up a monthly meeting with them, to go over their progress and to discuss any challenges that might come up. Use the meeting time to tweak their goals or make new ones.

Finally have them fill out page five

INTENTIONAL YEAR PLAN
Blessing & Family Ministry, FFWPU - USA

Monthly Meeting with your Pastor/BFM Rep or Mentor	
Date:	Month # _____
Husbands: What were your goals?	How did you do?
Wives: What were your goals?	How did you do?
Both: What were our goals?	How did we do?
What came up/what was hard?	Why?
Where did we fail/drop the ball?	What should we change?
Where did we do well? (Small Victories!)	What should we keep?
New goals or adjustments - Husband:	New goals or adjustments - Wife:
New Goals - Both:	
5. When will we meet next month?	Date:

Encourage them and celebrate their victories. Your support helps them to stay accountable, to themselves and each other, and that is essential to their growth and progress.

Check out Resources

Become familiar with the resources available to pastors and BFM leaders on the BFM website. They are extensive. Check out your local community for support programs {AA meetings, grief support groups, marriage-friendly counselors etc.}).

BFM Resources

- Webinars and Books on marriage
- Professional Counselors Listing and guidelines on how to find a professional you can trust, who will have a pro-marriage stance and appreciate our faith background.
- Crisis Resources: counseling, addiction, pornography, suicide, mental illness etc.
- Professional UC counselors
- Workshops and Retreats

Additional Resources Included

- **Love Language Questionnaire**

If the couple has not ever done the Love Language Questionnaire together, it can be very helpful to do. If they already know their partner's love language, ask them if they could put that knowledge into a specific goal. Knowing each other's love language allows them to give intentionally and receive positive feedback when doing so.

- Making Goals as a Couple
- Making Smart Goals
- 17 Pathways of Spiritual Growth and Experience of God
- Fixing People

Making Goals as a Couple — page one

1. Make your goal **action-oriented**. If they are specific and clear, it's easier to accomplish what you want to, and easier for your partner to make you happy. If the target is really visible, it's easier to get a bulls-eye! **Describe exactly what you and your partner will be doing when your goal is accomplished.**

Vague Goal: I want my spouse to communicate better vs. **Action-Oriented:** My spouse will turn off the TV and make eye contact when we're talking.

Goal 1 _____

Goal 2 _____

Goal 3 _____

My partner and I will be

Goal 1 _____

Goal 2 _____

Goal 3 _____

Making Goals as a Couple — page two

2 . Make sure you express your goal in **a positive way**, thinking about what you want to happen, rather than what you want to avoid.

Negative Goal: I want you to stop being so critical to me vs. **Positive Goal:** I really like it when you compliment me. Please do it more often.

Now review your goals to make sure they are stated positively. If not, re-write them below.

Ask yourselves: What will be the first sign that I am making progress toward my goal?

Adapted from *Keeping Love Alive*, Michelle Weiner Davis

17 Pathways of Spiritual Growth and Experience of God

1. Studying scripture and other spiritual writings	2. Prayer, privately and/or with others	3. Sharing highly meaningful experiences and concerns
4. Mentoring individuals or couples and nurturing their growth and/or faith	5. Being mentored by a spiritual elder and/or attending an elder	6. Singing meaningful songs and/or making or enjoying spiritual music
7. Studying, caring for and enjoying nature; living ecologically	8. Engaging in worship or spiritual education with others	9. Participating in religious rituals, ceremonies and other traditions
10. Participating in a small group to grow, learn and support each other	11. Admiring and creating beauty and/or making art	12. Taking care of family and/or helping neighbors
13. Serving God's work and/or the community, country or other greater causes	14. Working with and/or assisting those in the spiritual world	15. Spending time in meditation and/or solitude
16. Fasting, practicing purity and other kinds of self-discipline		17. Tithing, and practicing material simplicity

Foundation of Faith: 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17

Foundation of Substance: 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13

Bridging Spiritual Differences

Try to find spiritual paths to share together—this strengthens the marriage directly. Personal paths nourish each individual, but feed the relationship only indirectly.

How to find a shared spiritual path

1. Explore and discuss what is really meaningful to you and why
2. Experiment with each other's paths and with ones that are new to both of you
3. Commit to common values and ideals and practice them together—this can be as important as sharing specific religious beliefs:
 - God
 - Truth, Beauty, Goodness and Justice
 - True Love
 - Honesty and integrity
 - Care and service
 - Sacrifice for a higher cause

S.M.A.R.T. GOALS

S - Specific

M - Measurable

A - Achievable

R - Relevant

T - Timed

Specific - What do you really want to accomplish? Describe your goal precise terms so there is no confusion as to what needs to be accomplished. Try answering the “W’s”: Who, what, where, when, why.

Measurable - If we can’t measure our progress, how do we know when we are done? Make sure you include the measures you will use to judge your progress towards achieving the goal.

Achievable - Do I have enough control of this to make it happen? Construct a goal that is achievable. Don’t set it so high that in the back of your mind you know failure will eventually happen.

Relevant - Is this goal consistent with other goals, and does it fit with the immediate and long-range plans? Goals must be an important element in the overall plan of achieving your mission and reaching your vision. Meaningful goals align with your convictions and dreams. Your goal should relate to attaining something that is necessary, of value, and that supports your vision.

Timed - What is the evaluation deadline for this goal? Effective goals are constantly reviewed and revised. Determine a date, timeframe, or schedule for your goal.

How to Fix Other People's Problems

Mette Ivie Harrison Ph.D. (Princeton) Mormon in progress, mother of 5, author of 'The Bishop's Wife' and "His Right Hand," All-American triathlete

Talking to a family member who is currently serving in a role of pastoral care, I was surprised to hear him talk openly about the many, many members of his ward who came to him with massive problems: divorce, infidelity, financial ruin, children with disabilities, deaths, and every tragedy you can probably imagine.

"How do you fix problems like that?" I said, since I've never been in a position like this, except perhaps occasionally as a parent.

He said something like this: "I don't. That's the first thing I learned in this job. The impulse to fix is almost irresistible, but it's not my role to solve other people's problems. It's my job to listen to them, to comfort them, to condole with them, to pray for them, but never fix things that are their lives. It would be disrespectful for me to try to do more than that. If they can't fix it themselves, how could I, who knows so much less about their lives, fix it for them? And if God hasn't fixed it, then perhaps it's not supposed to be fixed."

I have thought a lot about this conversation in the last few months, about the impulse to fix things for other people and how much a part of religion that can often be. I think that part of my anger at God in many years of depression was because I wanted my life to be fixed. I wanted bad things not to happen to me. I had imagined that life was about choosing the right path so that I avoided sin and all the consequences of sin. I did not want to accept that life might be about dealing with tragedies that had no cause and had no easy solution.

I had spent my whole life up to that point being very good at seeing problems and fixing them. It truly stopped me in my tracks to try to see the world in a different way, not as a series of problems to be fixed, but rather a series of experiences to sit with and ponder.

When someone comes to me with a problem, they are often frustrated with me if I tell them it's not my place to fix their problems for me. But on the other hand, they are just as frustrated if I offer them a list of simple solutions that from my perspective seem like the right answers. The truth is that someone else's

life is not my life. It's not my purpose to fix their problems, just as it is not my purpose to judge them for not solving their problems the way that I think that they should.

Yes, people have problems. Yes, we are called as Christians to help others. But to me, this often means helping them to see their own problems and their own capacities to fix them in a loving and non-judgmental way--because this is the state we are all in. We all have beams in our own eyes and tend to see motes in other people's eyes. Perhaps the best we can do is remind each other about our own flaws and inability to see clearly.

My father, who served for a number of years as a Mormon bishop, told me that one of the things he had learned was about money problems. He said this after I had narrowly escaped declaring bankruptcy and losing my home.

It was his experience that once people realized that they had a problem with money, it was almost immaterial how deep they were in debt. If they stopped saying that they were making all the right choices already, that there was nothing else to be done but what they were doing, then making changes was easy.

And once they had a budget in place that meant they had stopped spending more money than they took in, financial solvency happened quickly afterward. Because people started solving their own problems once they saw them clearly and realized they had the power to do something about these problems.

I don't think that it's helpful to point out other people's problems to them from an imagined place of superiority. The truth is, I'm not sure that I often see what other people's problems are anyway. But sometimes having a loving conversation, mirroring their own words back to them, asking questions, and sharing some of my own experiences that might or might not relate, without any pressure on them to do anything, can lead to people seeing for themselves how they want to change their lives. And that is what I think is really helping other people.

This is why I don't often give advice to others. I am not sure how much my advice to someone else's situation can help. I have never had an experience where I thought that someone was facing exactly the same situation that I had faced previously. Even if I had, I'm not sure that I would necessarily know if my choice had been the only right one. If I had chosen badly, I have no confidence that I could now choose the right choice for someone

else in a different time. It's not as if there are ever really only two choices. Ultimately, I have stopped even wishing that I could solve problems for other people because I believe that if God hasn't fixed the problems for them, there is a reason for that.

This doesn't mean that I turn my back and shrug when people need help. I donate regularly to our local food kitchen and to global causes I believe in. I regularly carry cash to offer to the homeless, trying not to judge them if they ask for help. And I recently invited my sister and her son to come live with us for a couple of years while they worked out some financial and emotional problems.

I didn't fix their lives, but I provided a safe space for them to investigate their own problems and begin solving them on their own. I hope that this is what I do in conversation with people all the time, offer safe space to see the world clearly and their place in it as a beloved child of God who is still struggling to figure out what is the best way to move forward.