



# Life Principles for the Graduate

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*Nine truths for  
living God's way*

CHARLES F. STANLEY



THOMAS NELSON  
Since 1798

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## Life Principles for the Graduate

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*introduction*

## **A Lifelong Process of Becoming**

As you approach graduation, you probably are thinking more than ever about your future. The decisions you are making will affect all that lies ahead, and you're trying to create the best life possible for yourself. Throughout my many years, I have come to understand one thing clearly: Only God can help you live a truly extraordinary life.

When you place your hope in temporal things—money, social status, achievements, acceptance, or even the love of family and friends—your foundation will inevitably crumble. Worldly comforts are no defense against the tumultuous storms that life often delivers. If you are to stand strong, your identity must be based on something greater than what the world offers.

For believers, life is not about who you are but Whose you are. Understanding this is extremely important because it impacts your personal relationship with God as well as your future. Your goal is to get to know Him and, in the process, get yourself out of the way so He

can move in and through you. He has a distinct purpose for your life, and He wants you to understand it. When you finally see how beloved you are and how great your calling is, you will sense a desire growing within you to live for Him and in His power.

The Bible offers numerous principles for walking successfully with the Lord. It also teaches us how to live a strong, passionate, and committed life as we grow in faith. In this book, I will address nine time-tested ways God reveals His plans and purposes for our lives. They are based on His principles and offer the right pattern for success, hope, peace, and victory.

Becoming the masterpiece God created you to be is a lifelong process in which He is continually shaping you into a unique reflection of His Son. It is my prayer that you will embrace the process fully and, in so doing, discover the extraordinary life God has planned for you.

Charles F. Stanley



chapter one

## Surrender: The Starting Point

### Surrender Is the First Step

**“For if the willingness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.”**

**–2 Corinthians 8:12**

God designed your life for His glory. Even before you knew Him, He knew you intimately: “LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I get up; You understand my thought from far away. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways” (Psalm 139:1-3). When we surrender ourselves to God, we exchange our old thoughts, feelings, and desires for new ones. By faith, we believe that God is who He says He is and that He will do exactly what He has promised.

*Each one of us has been blessed with talents to be used for God's glory and work. Yielding to Him is the first step in the process of discovering those gifts and the wondrous purpose for your life.*

We still can reach our goals, overcome our failures, and enjoy success, but for a different reason. Instead of boasting about what we have achieved on our own, we can enjoy what God has given abundantly. Our lives become reflections of His life and love rather than a

checklist of human accomplishments.

Submit yourself to God. Fulfillment comes only when you decide to love God and give Him all of you. This does not mean that you settle for second best or stop doing what you have been gifted to do. Instead, you come to a point where you ask God to use you to the fullest so that others will come to know Him and experience His forgiveness and unconditional love. Those who have never discovered the wondrous joy that comes from loving and serving God have yet to experience His eternal fulfillment.

God has a plan for your life—a life that is exceptional: “‘For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for prosperity and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope’” (Jeremiah 29:11). When you trust and seek God, He will teach you how to live above your circumstances. Each one of us has been blessed with talents to be used for God’s glory and work. Yielding to Him is the first step in the process of discovering those gifts and the marvelous purpose for your life.

## **We Can Rely on God’s Great Love**

**“We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God,**

**and God remains in him ... There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.” –1 John 4:16, 18**

So often we run from God, thinking we need to escape His punishment or avoid doing some task He wants us to do. But what we are actually doing is missing His best for us.

God is omniscient. He knows all about us. He knows what we’ve done in the past and what we will do in the future. The awesome thing about His love is that it never stops. He loves us the same today as He did yesterday, and His love for us will never change. When we feel as though we have failed in life, He comes to us and raises up a banner of hope on our behalf: “Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5).

*We must accept and apply a crucial truth to our hearts: It is God's unconditional love that changes us and brings lasting fulfillment.*

Why is it so difficult to live the Christian life? And why do so many believers end up distressed and unsatisfied? The answers to these questions are found in our ability to accept and apply a crucial truth

to our hearts: It is God's unconditional love that changes us and brings lasting fulfillment. Once we understand and accept that there is no greater love than the love of God, we will be ready to take the first step toward living the life He has planned for us.

What goals do you hope to achieve? What dreams has God placed within your heart? Despite your fears and insecurities, you can achieve the goals He has given. There is a way to live each day satisfied and blessed.

God created you in the image of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His power exists within you. Surrendering to His will and purpose is one of the first steps in achieving a life of fulfillment. Once you begin your journey into His blessings, you will never want to turn back. The world may promise fame and fortune, but in terms of true contentment, it does not deliver. There is a cost involved whenever you go against God's best. Instead of falling prey to sin and failure, decide to stand firm in your faith by trusting Him to guide you in a direction that will lead to unimaginable blessings.

## Abiding in Christ

**“For this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and ... proclaim My name throughout the earth.” –Exodus 9:16**

Years ago, I faced a difficult time. I was working tirelessly to please God. Finally, I came to a point of burnout. More than likely, someone reading this book is facing the same thing. You want to keep your grades up, so you work overtime to achieve your goals. Even when you could take time off from studying, you burn the midnight oil. Or perhaps you just can't bring yourself to open a single textbook for more than a few minutes. You know you need to study, but your mind keeps drifting.

*By abiding, we discover that God sharpens our talents, purifies our minds, and prepares us for service in His kingdom.*

God ministered to me through John 15: “Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself but must remain in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (vv. 4-5).

The person who abides in the Lord lives not for him- or herself but for Jesus Christ. I discovered that it was not my responsibility to strive for anything. My part was to submit my life to God and allow Him to live His life through me. With that discovery, an enormous weight was removed from my life. Peace unlike anything I'd ever known filled

my heart. The energy and strength of Jesus became mine.

By abiding, we discover that God takes our thoughts and conforms them to His will and purpose. He sharpens our talents, purifies our minds, and prepares us for service in His kingdom.

Our treasures—the things we hold dear—become offerings of praise and worship to Him. We begin doing what He has called us to do, at the right time and in the right way. Learning how to plan with His goals in mind is crucial to every area of life. He wants to refocus our spiritual eyesight so we see only Him and not the things that make us feel fearful or unsure. We don't have to waste valuable time, and we don't have to work compulsively to do our best. He has set the right pace for our journey. We can rest because He is in control of all things and because we know that He has a plan and purpose for our existence.

## Your Personal Mission

**“Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.” –Psalm 37:4-5 NKJV**

I often encouraged those in my congregation to write a mission statement for their lives, and you should do the same. Ask God to

show you how He wants you to live. You are never too young or too old to set goals with His mission in mind. Each person who dedicates his or her life to God is given a valuable role to play in His kingdom.

We may not realize the impact of our lives on others. However, God does. He is looking for people who are willing to serve Him. When we say yes to His plans, He will take care of all the details.

Ask Him, “Lord, how do You want me to invest my life?” It may involve something other than your vocation—a job may or may not represent God's purpose for you. We are called to be Christ's disciples in every area of life. Peter, Andrew, and John spent three to four years with the Savior. During that time, Jesus laid a basic foundation for their futures.

The same can be true for you. Whether you know it or not, God is personally involved in your life. He loves you with an everlasting love, and He wants to demonstrate it to you—so draw near to Him. No matter what has happened in the past, He has plans that stretch far beyond this moment in time.

One of the foundations of the Christian life is the act of spending

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time with Christ. When our lives and hearts are focused on Him, we will discover His personalized purpose and will for us.

Often people ask the question, *What does God want me to do?* This seems easy to answer, especially when there is a plan to follow—a well-charted major or a career path after graduation. However, His Word says, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5-6). Success God’s way includes doing what He has given you to do. It is a matter of simple, basic trust in Him.

Peace and a sense of satisfaction are gifts to those who let go of personal desires and experience the reality of God’s goodness. Learning to abide instead of striving teaches you to place your trust in Someone who knows much more than you do about what is to come. Once you have experienced God’s goodness, you’ll never want to return to a life of straining for outcomes. You will want to know more about your Savior and how your life can better reflect His love and grace to others.

## God’s Workmanship

**“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,**

**which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”**

**—Ephesians 2:10**

Understanding your position in Christ is the rudder that directs everything you do. Believing the truth about who God says you are—a genuine masterpiece—is essential to your future. You are the creation of God’s hands, and He wants you to be a reflection of His glory and character: “We all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

*You are the creation of God's hands, and He wants you to be a reflection of His glory and character.*

He wants you to understand the reason you were created (and then re-created through Christ) as well as what your purpose in life is. When you do, you will be energized to live for God through His power.

God wants us to experience joy in Him. We were created for excellence, and from His perspective, our lives represent infinite possibilities. Trusting Him and understanding His great love for us opens the door to a rich, satisfying life.

*chapter two*

## Grace: Why We Need It

### We Are Lost Without Christ

**“But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we did in righteousness, but in accordance with His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” –Titus 3:4-5**

Over the years, I have occasionally heard someone say, “I guess I am just going to hell when I die. There is no way God could love me. I’m beyond His help.” Friend, no one is ever beyond God’s reach. He loves us, and He created each one of us for His good pleasure. No one should speak so carelessly! It is true that each one of us will spend eternity in either heaven or hell, but God wants us to know that Jesus Christ—His only begotten Son—came to die on a cross to pay the sin debt of all humanity and thereby reconcile us to the Father. And our unconditionally loving God has made it possible for anyone to trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord. When you receive Christ by faith as your personal Savior, God changes your eternal destiny. One moment lost, the next moment saved. Formerly headed for hell, now with a home in heaven.

*When you receive Christ by faith as your personal Savior, God changes your eternal destiny.*

Without God’s grace, we would be utterly without hope. But amaz-

ingly, He offers us eternal life in Christ. The best and most important thing we can do is accept this free gift of an unshakable foundation and the promise of a glorious future.

For you—a student with a bright future, this truth is very important. It means once you accept Christ as your Savior, you are no longer alone. You can turn to Him and ask for His help when you are studying for a final, as well as when you are preparing your course schedule for the next term. He is walking with you every step of the way. He knows when you are low in confidence, lack funds, or have grades that ended up not meeting your expectations. He wants you to know that you are not a failure. You are His, and He is committed to you and your future.

## Our Great Savior

**“Jesus ... because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is also able to save forever those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” –Hebrews 7:24-25**

Some people ask why we celebrate the resurrection. The main reason is that Jesus, our Lord and Savior, is alive; only Christ arose from the dead. No other religious founder can say this. It is very important for

you to understand the resurrection because the same power—His resurrection power—is living in you today through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

We celebrate an empty tomb because the One we love, follow, and serve is no longer there. Now, if the Savior arose from the dead, where is He? Scripture tells us that He is seated at the right hand of God, interceding on your behalf. That is, as you pray, He prays for you, telling the Father your needs, your heartaches, and your deepest desires (Hebrews 7:25). Moreover, Jesus is preparing a place for you and me to be with Him in heaven (John 14:2-3). In the meantime, He is arranging all the events necessary for your future and for His return.

*His resurrection has given us a very definite purpose for being alive. He has saved us so that we would reflect His life in our work, our ways, our words, and our walk.*

First John 2:1-2 reminds us that the Lord is our Advocate. You see, when the Son of God saved us, He knew we would not live perfect lives. He knew we would sin against Him, so He intercedes for us. This defense is based not merely upon our confession and repentance for the forgiveness of sin, but upon the fact that He laid down His life and

paid our sin debt in full. When Jesus went to the cross, He died a substitutionary, sacrificial death on our behalf, so we can be absolutely confident that our sins are totally forgiven. Salvation has nothing to do with our behavior, but it has everything to do with the grace, love, goodness, and mercy of God and the blood of Jesus Christ.

His resurrection has given us a very definite purpose for being alive. He has saved us so that we would reflect His life in our work, our ways, our words, and our walk. That is why you and I are the body of Christ. He is looking through our eyes, hearing through our ears, speaking through our voices, and helping through our hands. Having created us for Himself, He desires that you and I walk in holiness and righteousness before Him. We are to be Christ's representatives, pointing people to Him and reflecting His light to a world in desperate need.

## God's Love Frees Us From Bondage

**"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."**

**—Galatians 5:1**

Accepting the incredibly expansive love of God is not easy. Many people live their lives convinced that they feel distanced from God

because of some sin. They pray incessantly for forgiveness, trying to get beyond the grip of sins that, from God's viewpoint, are simply no longer there. It may be hard to believe, but there are strong Christians who live this way, harboring feelings of shame and self-doubt that have more to do with their fear than with reality.

Others know they are saved but have never discovered the true joy and contentment that come from knowing God in a loving and intimate way. One of the primary reasons the apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Colossae was to tell of the awesome freedom that is available to us through Jesus Christ. False teachers had entered the fellowship of this New Testament church. They were teaching that while it was right to accept Jesus as the Messiah, one also must live under the regulations of the Mosaic law. Jesus came to set us free from burdens like that. We can obey His law because it has been given to us as a framework for living the abundant life. Nothing brings greater joy than knowing that you can obey God and receive His endless blessings.

*Nothing brings greater joy than knowing that you can obey God and receive His endless blessings.*

However, we cannot attest to God's grace while living in bondage.

Wholeness is found only in Jesus, not in abiding by prescribed rules or regulations. But we always need to remember that our freedom in Christ was very costly. The Father gave His Son so that we can live each day in the light of His freedom and hope. Never abuse this God-given gift by knowingly entering into sin. When He tells you to steer clear of something, He does this for a reason. Most of the time, it is to protect you from harm. Sin destroys, while the love of God brings freedom.

The Christian life is an expression of God's grace rather than a checklist of dos and don'ts. That is what Christianity is all about—freedom to enjoy the life God has given us and freedom to share this truth with others.

## An Encounter With Grace

**“There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the LORD's counsel—that will stand.” –Proverbs 19:21 NKJV**

The direction your life takes is affected by many things, such as the environment in which you are living, the decisions you make, and the education you receive. But by far the most powerful influence in a believer's life is the transforming grace of God, which is His kindness toward you regardless of your worthiness.

God's ultimate will is for every believer to be conformed to the

likeness of His Son. His grace is responsible for your rebirth, and it directs, moves, and influences you to become increasingly Christlike. In that way, you can say with the apostle Paul, “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

The apostle's life, in fact, is a powerful example of God's transforming grace. In Philippians 3, Paul described how he once depended on his good works, nature, and conduct to gain acceptance before God. He did not originally understand there is only one way to be made acceptable in God's sight—by His grace.

However, encountering the living Christ totally changed Paul, and he explained, “Whatever things were gain to me, these things I have [now] counted as loss because of Christ” (Philippians 3:7). He recognized that all his human titles and achievements had no spiritual value. We, too, must realize we will never merit eternal life by depending on anything we are or anything we do. It is by grace and grace alone that we are saved (Ephesians 2:8-9).

It was the grace of God that shaped Paul's thinking. He learned that

*It is out of His gentle love—not condemnation or chastisement—that the heavenly Father arranges the circumstances and challenges of your life.*

everything he once counted as valuable was actually worthless. What made the difference was the fact that Paul came face-to-face with the Savior on the road to Damascus.

Is God talking to your heart? Is He asking you to do something you don't like or something you are afraid to do? Remember that it is out of His gentle love—not condemnation or chastisement—that the heavenly Father arranges the circumstances and challenges of your life. Whatever He requires of you is always in your best interest and will be part of the process that conforms you to the image of His Son.

Just as it was with the apostle Paul, an encounter with God's grace will change your course—and it will always lead you in the best possible direction. Therefore, don't hesitate to accept His gracious plan. He sees all the potential pitfalls, challenges, and blessings that will come and knows the right way around danger. You can rest in Him.



*chapter three*

## Connecting With God: The Most Effective Way to Live

### The Treasure of Knowing Christ

**“This is what the LORD says: ‘Let no wise man boast of his wisdom, nor let the mighty man boast of his might, nor a rich man boast of his riches; but let the one who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me.’” –Jeremiah 9:23-24**

Knowing Jesus as Lord radically rearranges our priorities, alters our perspective, and influences our relationships and decision-making processes. Christ becomes our focus and center. In His presence, we gain indescribable peace.

*Knowing Jesus as Lord radically rearranges our priorities, alters our perspective, and influences our relationships.*

Prestige, possessions, and power are but “rubbish” when compared with the blessing of knowing Jesus (Philippians 3:8). Discovering His faithfulness, experiencing His help, and embracing His purposes bring significance to every facet of life.

Paul understood that his highest goal was to gain experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ. He was willing to undergo harsh treatment and imprisonment because such things would help him to know the Savior more fully. He was able to tolerate afflictions because he viewed them in the light of a broader spiritual goal: