

Discover Your Focus for the New Year

So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom. – Psalm 90:12 NASB

I don't have enough time to live my own life! I reached this conclusion after trying to follow all the advice given on a morning news show one week in January. It seemed like a smart way to start my day. I figured I'd tune in, get the forecast, learn the headlines, and maybe hear a celebrity interview.

I wasn't expecting all the show segments telling me how to live my life better. Most of these segments offered the promise of deliverance: "Financial Freedom Is Closer than You Think" or "Four Secrets to Better Communication." Others, I decided, were designed to scare the socks off of me: "Six Health Risks Every Person Faces" or "Thieves You Cannot See – Avoiding Identity Theft."

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

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

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

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

I need to pay attention to my finances. Save and invest. Spend frugally – yet somehow also buy the cool gadgets they review on the show. Apparently extreme couponing is the way to afford it all, but it takes a lot of time to save 80 percent on your grocery bill. I need to check my credit report regularly. Shred important documents. Back up my computer. Meet with my financial planner.

And read the information that comes with our kid's (underfunded) college fund. That, by the way, is forty pages of legal and financial mumbo jumbo in eight-point font, single-spaced. I suppose I need to meet with my attorney to understand it. And that creates two prerequisite tasks to add to the list: find an attorney and find a financial planner. They assume every regular Joe has a CFP, a CPA, and a JD on speed dial. I have Domino's on mine.

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

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

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

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

In January of 2007, I challenged my church, Port City Community Church in Wilmington, North Carolina, to ditch their New Year's resolutions and each pick a word to focus on that year. I titled the series and the project "My One Word." People quickly embraced it. Within a few years, *My One Word* embedded itself into the DNA of our church.

It's how we now approach personal change and spiritual growth. One of the coolest things to me is how *My One Word* not only gives people a doable way to focus on their spiritual formation, but an easy way to talk about it. Around here you'll hear people *What Is My One Word?*

Couples, family, and friends all help hold each other accountable, simply by talking about their words – around the dinner table, at small group meetings, even on Facebook. In January 2009, the nation's most notable Christian radio station called my office. K-LOVE had heard about *My One Word* and invited me to come on the air to tell their listeners about the project.

I shared *My One Word* with half a million listeners that month. And I returned to the K-LOVE airways to talk about *My One Word* in 2010 and throughout 2011. A movement caught fire. The movement didn't become a movement because K-LOVE called me, but because God has called each of us. This is not a movement of me or my church, but a movement of God. And of his people wanting to be transformed into his image.

Focus Is Required Our lives are fast-paced and demanding. Our attention is divided. The normal, natural pace of our lives will not likely lead us toward spiritual formation. We have so many things to focus on that spiritual formation tends to fall to the wayside, along with our good intentions to rotate our mattress or wax our cars.

Most of us feel overwhelmed at the idea of embarking on a grand plan for spiritual formation like reading through the

Bible in a year or memorizing a verse every week. We'd like to, but it just hasn't happened. Enter *My One Word*. It's easy, doable, and surprisingly powerful, mainly because it supplies narrowed focus.

We're so busy with the surface-level things of life that we forget to number our days and tend to our hearts. We become so preoccupied with getting our lives to a manageable point or a better future that we miss both the moment right now and the reality of a coming eternity. Yet God calls us to use our days to develop a heart of wisdom.

This is an excerpt from "My One Word: Change Your Life With Just One Word" (Zondervan) by Mike Ashcraft and Rachel Olsen. **Mike** is cofounder and lead pastor of Port City Community Church in Wilmington, N.C. He studied at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Ashcraft and his high school sweetheart, Julie, have been married for 20 years, and they have two school-age daughters.

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