

GUIDE

Welcome! As we gain some momentum this year I'm wondering how your resolutions are coming. I wanted to do something different this year because year after year I start off with a bang and then everything falls by the wayside fairly quickly (though I actually made it to March one year). I'm excited about this because I think that you'll find this *Questionnaire* helpful, and that you'll be able to create a lifestyle of what you want instead of merely another "try." As you think about building something new in your life (let's call it a "building" instead of a "resolution," that word is so worn out) ask Holy Spirit what you need his help with, and once you decided which one or two changes you'd like to incorporate in your life, sit down and fill out the *Questionnaire*.

I'm using the metaphor of building because I've developed a negative reaction to the same old words and thoughts and I want a fresh, new picture of change.

This *Questionnaire* came about when my two friends and I got frustrated over not following through with the positive life changes we so badly want. We decided that this year we'll do something different, including meeting each Saturday morning to compare notes and encourage each other (hence this *Questionnaire* to get us going).

The important thing about this is that it's not set in stone—you're to *enjoy* changing. Once you make your commitment and get started don't look at it as a chore or as something hard—change your brain. As you do it think pleasant thoughts and focus on the positive feelings that it brings. Don't say, "Oh, I HAVE to get that done today." Think, "Oh, I get to do _____ today!" Your emotions follow your thoughts.

One thing that you might consider doing for a week is keeping a Time Log, just to see what you actually spend your time on. Online you can find a downloadable daily time sheet, print 7 of them and then label each one a different day. From when you get up until you go to bed, keep track on it of everything you do. It doesn't have to be super-specific, you don't have to label when you're in the bathroom, etc., I just put "Breakfast & getting ready for the day," knowing that that included my hair, face, and making the bed. You don't even have to look back at this at the end of the week if you don't want to, what it does is make you aware of what you're doing with your time, giving you insight as to whether you're wasting time or whether

you're just busy. You can learn a lot about the reality of your time by doing this.

The most surprising outcome of doing this and then comparing notes with my friends each week has been how much we've learned about ourselves. This is a process, not a formula that must be followed, and each week we tweak what we're doing. So please don't merely fill out the *Questionnaire* and then start your new habit or change, but each week (even if you're doing this alone) stop and analyze how the week before went and what you've learned. Then think about how you can incorporate what you've learned into the following week. It's possible that it could take several times of beginning a new method of accomplishing what you want before you find what works. For example, I wanted to get in more writing time each week. I started off with a goal of "Write 500 words a day." That didn't work because I respond better to *input* (time invested) than I do *output* (what is produced). So I changed to "Write 10 hours a week." That's input so it should work great for me, right? Nope. Figuring out why it didn't work resulted in an "Aha!" moment that has brought me to where I am now—"I will get up every day at 5:45 AM and write from 6:00 to 7:00." (Whatever time I add during the rest of the day is gravy.) And guess what? Before I started doing this I would have told you I'd never do this, I love my sleep too much. After one week of it I'm in love—I've never regretted it once, and when I check my alarm each night to be sure it's on I feel a thrill of excitement and anticipation of getting up at 5:45 to write. I would never have believed it!

This *Questionnaire* is divided into 3 sections—*BRAINSTORMING*, *BLUEPRINT*, and *BUILDING*. At the bottom you'll find some *WEEKLY UPDATE* questions to ask yourself at the end of each week, plus some *DISCUSSION QUESTIONS*, in case you want to do this with a friend.

The 1st section on the *Questionnaire* is *Brainstorming*. Here you'll think about what you want to build, why you want to build it, and why it didn't work in the past.

This is really important because there's no reason to build something that will blow away when the first storm hits, or even if it can stand against the storm it still falls when it hails. In order to know how to build a strong building you have to understand what works for you and what doesn't. Why you are the way you are is good to know, but the bottom line is this—*what works?*

There are many great ways to understand why you are the way you are, some of my favorite ones being:

[Why You Act the Way You Do](#) by Tim LaHaye

[Now, Discover Your Strengths](#) by Marcus Buckingham

[Go, Put Your Strengths to Work](#) by Marcus Buckingham

[The Power of Habit](#) by Charles Duhigg

[Willpower: Discovering the Greatest Human Strength](#) by Roy F.

Baumeister (The science of willpower—fascinating!)

[The Procrastination Equation](#) by Piers Steel (This is the science of procrastination and I've found it wonderful insight into myself and how to instigate permanent change.)

Yet I've found that, while I totally love reading self-help books and I've learned a lot from them, it still boils down to this: when the hammer meets the nail, what works for you and what doesn't? That's the secret to building something that will last, that will stand the storms and hail and tornados of life, because there isn't a formula that works across the board. There are many things that work for many people, but unless they work within *your* formula they're merely cheap building materials that won't lay a solid foundation.

And guess what? While you might have a pretty good guess about what will work for you, you'll learn a lot by trial and error (and fairly quickly). For example, I thought that having a detailed computer program to track what I waste time on would be the ticket for me, because I'm easily distracted (okay, I only have to THINK of something else and I'm running after it). I tried two different ones (if you look at my answers to the *Questionnaire* you'll see what worked and didn't work for me) and found that they were too involved, I've since found that I need one that is super-easy and simple to use.

Under the subheading of **"Why did my buildings in the past blow away," Questions 7 through 10** (on what has worked and not worked for you in the past) are *hugely* important. This is the basis for building something that will be around for a long time. No matter how many personality tests, quizzes, and self-help books you've read (I feed off of all those) the only way your building will stand is to learn what works for you. At first you won't really know yourself this well, it's a process. Learning these things will take time but they're the gold you dig up while building your foundation. This list of what works is a dynamic list that is ever changing so keep tweaking your list. This list is what you build off of when

you're deciding what you'll be doing the next week and how you're going to structure it. For example, in my writing I've always tried to set lots of goals (1 month, 6 months, 1 year, 5 years) but I recently learned that both because I'm so distractible and I like instant gratification I don't do well with long-term goals, I need to set daily and weekly goals. I've learned that creating a list of all that needs to be done and attaching a date to it soon has my building wobbling as I pass the first date, and I'm then too overwhelmed on the rest and oops! there goes my building. Instead, I use a list of the next few things to be done in my writing and set a date for the first one. Only when I check that one off do I pick a date for the next item. Spend some time thinking over things you've tried in the past and it's okay to have a long list of what *doesn't* work and not much on what *does* work, because we can't build something strong overnight.

Question 12, "What motivates me?" will give you valuable insight, again because it's about *you* and how you work. Look through this sample list and see which of these work for you. If you really want to delve deep, once you have your list of what motivates you then make a list of what *hinders* you, for example, some on my list of hindrances are: a messy desk, chores waiting on me, sitting too long, feeling overwhelmed, and a bad chair.

POSSIBLE MOTIVATIONS

- *Deadlines*
- *Finances*
- *Passion*
- *God-stuff*
- *Anger*
- *Taking a class (accountability & others with similar interests)*
- *Accountability (that deadline thing with encouragement)*
- *Positive Thinking*
- *Positive feedback*
- *Planning*
- *Friends with similar interests*
- *Motivational/Self-help tools*
- *A Challenge*
- *Order*
- *Rewards*
- *Lectures*
- *Scolding*
- *Belittling*
- *Guilt*
- *Competition*

- *Revenge*
- *Shaming*
- *Fear*
- *Dares*
- *Knowing I have to do it*

The 2nd section on the Questionnaire is *Blueprint*. In this section you'll look at what you want to do in the future, along with ways you are unique.

In **question 4**, I use the word *pre-commit*. The book *Willpower* refers to these as *bright lines*. A bright line is setting a boundary that you won't cross. For example, a bright line might be: "At work today we're having snacks but I'm not eating any chips." Later, when you stand in front of the snacks, you have a much better chance at not eating any chips because your bright line is strong. Without it, when you look at the chips and THEN try to not eat any you don't have the willpower, because you're trying to drum it up in your weak moment. By having a bright line (pre-commitment) set ahead of time you're much more likely to stick with something than if you don't. So what the question below is asking is, what are your bright lines, or pre-commitments, that will help you here?

Question 6 asks: *Are you an abstainer or a moderator? Some people have to abstain from what they want to change, totally give it up. Other people are moderators, they can just alter what they're doing and do fine. For example, if an abstainer wants to lose weight they'll might stop eating any cookies at all, because it's easier for them to stop altogether then to cut back. A moderator cuts back, limiting themselves to one cookie per day/week, etc.* Gretchen Rubin (who has a great [quiz](#) for this, along with other fun quizzes), says *"If moderators try to abstain, they feel trapped and rebellious. If abstainers try to be moderate, they spend a lot of time justifying why they should go ahead and indulge."*

Question 7 here is also especially important—*What bad self-talk am I telling myself?* Once you start listening to yourself you'll be surprised at what you hear, and don't limit this to what you want to build. Listen to what you're saying about who you are and your life in general. I began to hear myself saying "This is overwhelming." "There's too much to do." That showed me that to change I have to tell myself something different. So now when I hear myself saying "It's too overwhelming" I respond, "This isn't overwhelming, I'm just taking it a bit at a time and I'm getting through it."

The 3rd section is *Building*. Here you get specific on what you're building, and then you decide which tools you're planning to use this week. I

say “this week” because as you learn what works for you there are good odds that you’ll be changing some of your tools week to week. It’ll take a while to find your building rhythm as you discover habits and routines that work for you.

On the Questionnaire get specific on what you’re doing, and SPECIFIC is the key. **Look back on the Questionnaire at your answers and use what you’ve learned about yourself to fill out this section.** Below explains what each of these are asking:

Parameters - When I talk about what “parameters” you’ll set around yourself it’s the same as pre-commitment and “bright lines.” I like using the word parameters because it denotes building a fence that keeps out the things that will destroy my building. It not only protects me from the floods and winds but the small things too, like the ivy that would grow on my building, finding the cracks so it can work its roots into them and weaken it. Check back on your previous answers and use them to list as many as you feel you need. What are your “Sirens” (what distracts you), and look in the first section on why your previous buildings have blown away. For example, one of mine is: *Don’t open email or my Journal. (Distraction).*

Habits – Here we’re looking at things you can do to build a habit, or make it easier to build one. What tips might help you stick with what you’re trying to do? Study your daily life and sort out a rhythm that might work for you. Look in the first section on why your buildings have blown away in the past and see how you could order your day to accommodate something different. Also, look at your distractions and see how you could incorporate a habit that helps prevent it, for example, if you have the habit of snacking on unhealthy snacks and yet have to have them for others in the household, change that habit by not having them as easily available, or keep special ones for yourself easier to reach. You want to make it as easy to incorporate these changes as possible, so list as many as you feel you need. For example, one of mine is: *Try to get in my God-time right after supper (before I’m too tired later).*

Brain Changes – Einstein said, “If you always do what you always did, you will always get what you always got.” We can’t just decide to stick with something and it happens. To get different results we have to bring together all these aspects into a custom-designed formula. How are you going to change your brain? Check out your answers above regarding your self-talk, what motivates you, and your excuses. What do you say that’s negative about what you’re wanting to do? Write positive responses to those so your brain changes its automatic response, for example, when you hear yourself thinking, “I don’t want to do this,” respond by saying, “I *want* to do this

because it'll feel good tonight knowing I've done it." List as many as you feel you need. For example, some of my changes are: *"Record 3 minutes of affirmation and listen to it every morning as early as possible," "Have accountability with friends," and "Read feedback on my writing to keep me motivated."*

Rewards – Look back on your answers to what motivates you and what your "love language" is. Being an "instant gratification" person my tendency is to tell myself, "Why wait until the work is done, I'm having it NOW." I'm working on that ... List as many ways to reward yourself as you can get away with. Two of mine are: "Meet with Jan C. and Chong every Saturday morning to compare notes on our week of building" (I can't take this reward ahead of time), and "For every 5 hours I write I get to play an hour of *King's Quest* (PC game)." You might be surprised at what a reward turns out to be—Chong has been trying to walk 10,000 steps every day and just looking at the weekly stats on her phone pedometer emotionally sends her over the top—all those tall, green bars on the graph. She's taken a screen shot of one week and looks at it when she needs encouragement. She had no idea when she started how rewarding that would be.

My plan for disappointment in myself is – At some point you'll be disappointed in how your building is going, so think ahead of how you're going to handle that and not give up. This is also a "brain changer" but I want you to specifically think about how you're going to deal with this. One way is to call a friend and get some encouragement. Stop and dissect what the root of this is because it'll bring feelings of "I've been through this before," and "I knew this wouldn't change." Plan now how you're going to deal with feeling that way. The best way I've found is to acknowledge your feelings and then tell yourself something positive. Even better is to record into your phone your "disappointment affirmation" and listen to it whenever you feel that you've let yourself down. Eventually your brain will change to respond to disappointment with those words instead of the others.

My Disappointed-in-myself Affirmation – On the *Questionnaire* write here what you're going to tell yourself when you're disappointed in your week. For example, here is mine:

"I am not a failure. I am in a season where, while writing is a priority, I have the gift of time with Mama and my children, so I accept that some of my time will willingly be focused there. I am giving of myself to others in my family and I accept gratefully that this is for today and there will be other times to write. I am an amazing person who works hard but I accept that I haven't felt like I've done my best and I am doing better now. I am living up

to my expectation and I know that God loves me and that tomorrow I will do even better. Thank you Holy Spirit for helping me."

At the end of the Questionnaire is a [WEEKLY UPDATE](#), it's important to answer these questions at the end of every week, because as you build you'll discover which tools don't work for you so that you can incorporate new ones. I have been astounded at how this has worked for my friends and me, as every week we alter what we're doing to fit what we're learning.

You'll also find a few [DISCUSSION QUESTIONS](#) to use if you do this with someone else, which I recommend because the accountability is great and it's fun to get together (at Starbucks?) and celebrate what you're accomplished.

I believe that most of us truly want to make changes in our lives and yet no matter how hard we try we fall back into the old habits and ways. That's because 1) we don't actually change anything, we just determine to do it, coming up with plans that often don't make a lasting difference, and 2) we don't work according to who we are. The most important key to making a difference is that you experiment until you understand how you work, adjusting what you're doing until it fits. We need to listen to our life-rhythms and what our body, soul, and spirit are telling us. (And what Holy Spirit is saying!) Only when we do this will we build structures that can stand the test of time.

I hope that this helps you begin to build something beautiful and lasting.

Brenda