



Thrive Practices for Discovery

Finding Purpose



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Purpose is a facet of Spiritual Health.

Each of us is uniquely created with gifts, talents, and passions, and finding purpose means mobilizing what is unique about us, meaningfully, into purposeful endeavors, not just for ourselves but for others as well.

What is purpose?

Purpose is an enduring and achievable goal that is meaningful to the individual and contributes to the world beyond the life of the individual. ⁽¹⁾

There are three key facets to purpose.

1. It involves an actionable and enduring goal—something we can actually do and aim to accomplish.
2. It's personally meaningful and aligned to one's strengths, skills, and natural proclivities (in other words, this is living our own dreams, not the dreams of our parents or our partners).
3. It has a beyond-the-self orientation—it contributes beyond our own lives. It's bigger than making money or chasing happiness.

Explore your purpose with Thrive Practices

Work through these practices in order to discover purpose. You can do this by yourself, with a trusted friend or partner, or within a small group. Gain insight into who you are and how you might contribute. Because purpose involves contribution, finding purpose is a way to live out love in the world.

(1) [The Path to Purpose](#), William Damon





Questions for Life Review

A practice to discover meaning and purpose.

Introduction:

If you find yourself in a time of transition – perhaps your youngest child just left for college, or you are recently divorced, or you are approaching retirement – the process of life review provides insight into who you are, letting your life speak (Parker Palmer). This process can be used as a simple reflection or as a guide toward your next project, whether it be volunteer, vocation, family, or something else. Ask yourself...

- Who are you, and who are you meant to become?
- How do you understand what it means to live well?
- What and who are truly meaningful to you?

These questions are intended to help you discover and are adapted from Clark University's Life Review Manual, based on the work of Dr. Robert Butler, whose work is further developed by Dr. William Damon in his book, *A Round of Golf with My Father*, and in Season 1, Episode 11 of the *With & For* podcast.





Life Review Questions

Directions: Grab paper and pen or talk with a close friend about the following aspects of your life.

1) Where did you grow up?

2) What was your community like growing up?

3) What kind of schooling did you have?

4) What were your parents/step-parents like?

5) Are there particular things about your parents, or expectations from your parents that influenced you?





6) Did you have any brothers or sisters? What are/were they like? Are you similar? In what ways?

7) How would you describe your passions and joys during your childhood?

8) What was it like when you were a teenager? What were you interested in?

9) Did you marry? At what age? If not, why not?

10) What is/was your marriage like?





11) What was your first job? Did you like it?

12) Have you had a career? Describe it. Was it satisfying?

13) Did you have children? Did you enjoy raising them?

14) What is your relationship like with your children?

15) Who else are you close to? What is it about them that makes you feel connected?





16) Who have been the most influential people at various stages in your life? Why? When? What were you doing at that time?

17) Who are the important people in your life now?

18) If you had to pick one person who had a major impact on your life, who would it be? Why?

19) How have your friendships changed through the years?

20) What makes you content or happy now?





Finding Purpose by Imagining the Future and Excavating the Past

A practice from an interview with Dr. Belle Liang, adapted from her book, How to Navigate Life.

Introduction:

Research shows there are many benefits to envisioning the future. As we envision the future, it is also helpful to reflect on the influences of our perception of what a successful future looks like. As we do this, we can formulate our individual sense of success, distinct from societal definitions and external influences.

Guiding Questions:

Directions: Gather a sheet of paper and a pen or pencil. Take five minutes and write without stopping. Allow your guiding question to be, “In an ideal world, what does success look like for me?” This may include certain strengths you have or ways that you would like to impact the world.



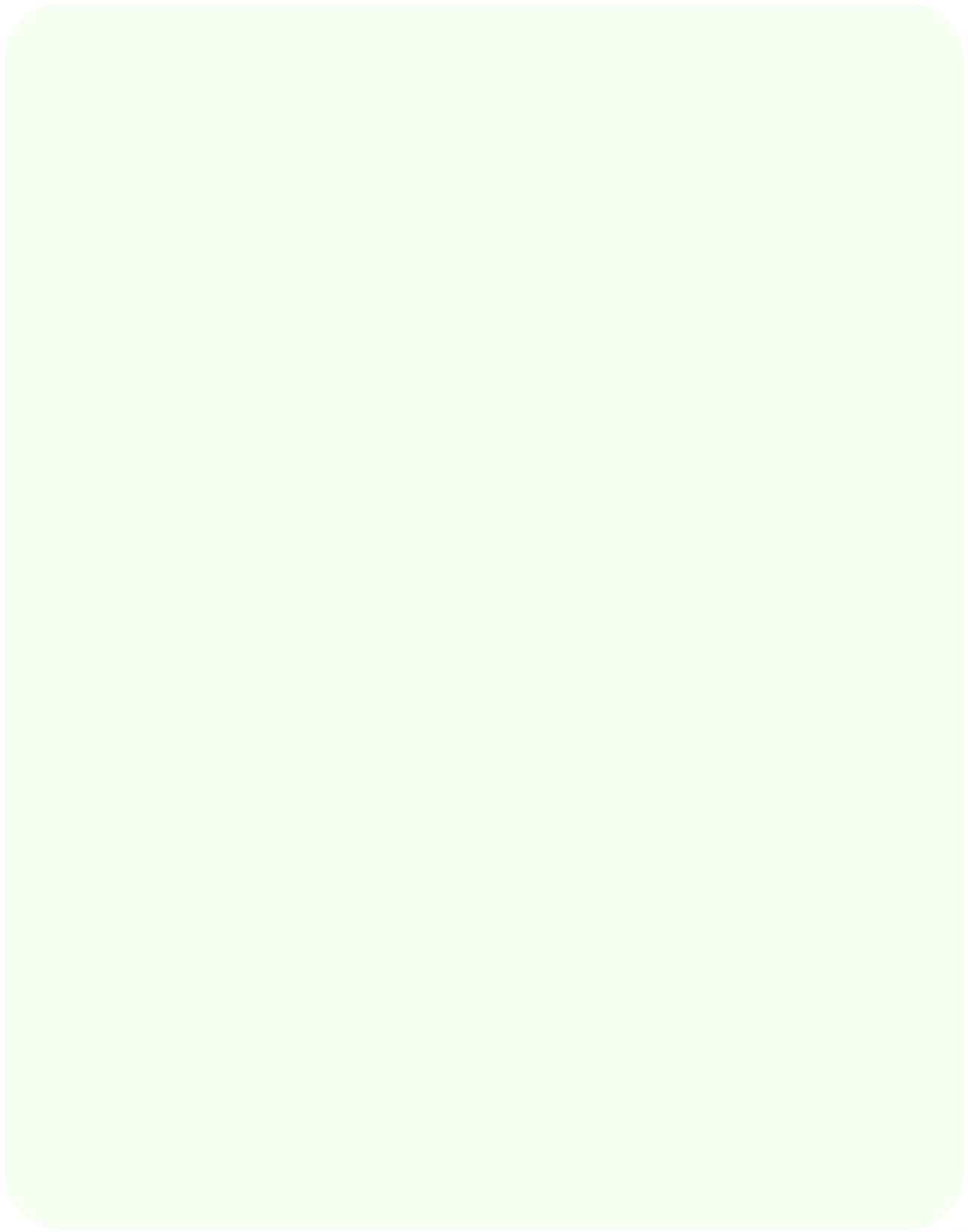




Next, look at what you've written and **highlight four or five phrases that are especially meaningful to you**. If it feels helpful, share what you have envisioned with a trusted person.

Now that you have a vision for your future picture of success, let's reflect on the past and what has informed your ideas around success. What are some formative experiences that you have had? What relationships have been especially meaningful to you and may have given you an ideal of success to aspire to? What impact did they have on you? These may be positive and/or negative experiences. Journal about this for five minutes.







Choose one experience to dig deeper into. Did this relationship or experience cause you to think differently about yourself or the world? Did it cause you to trust more or trust less? Did it cause you to commit an action that altered the course of your life?

- From these reflections, **craft a story.**
 - The basics: Who, when, what, where.
 - The movement: What happened to cause the actions or experience to take place (by either yourself or another person)?
 - The impact: How did this impact you?
 - The success revealed: How did this experience alter your definition of success?

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Taking away the elements of societal pressures and outside expectations allows us to understand success on our own terms, which often looks very different from society's terms. Reflecting on these formative experiences can help us understand what brought us to this perception of success.

This practice is adapted from work by Belle Liang discussed in **How to Navigate Life.**



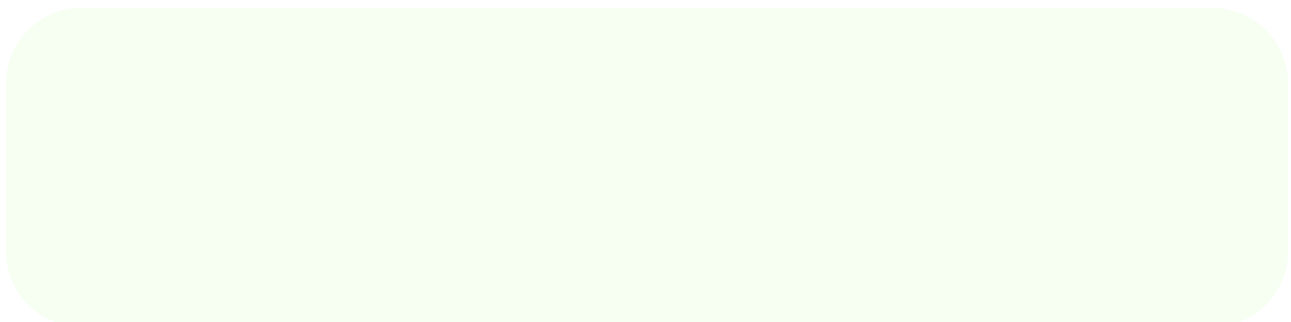


Patiently Setting Goals Toward Purpose

Why is patience so important for achieving our goals? We need patience to stay the course and persevere. Get help with this practice.

Setting goals helps us identify steps toward our purposes, but sometimes we are so hard on ourselves when we fall short of our goals that we struggle with resetting. Practice setting goals and patiently approaching setbacks with this set of questions.

1) Do you have a sense of a bigger purpose for your life? It might be coming alongside others to help them develop regular spiritual practices, or it might be that you want to become a nurse or psychologist. Perhaps right now your purpose is raising your children to be contributing adults. Whatever your bigger purposes, try to identify where your gifts, talents and passions meet the needs of the world.





2) Identify 1-2 tangible goals you need to achieve that move you toward your purposes. These could be things like getting up 30 minutes earlier to read scripture and pray, or it might be that you need to start writing essays for applications. Whatever the goal, write it down and describe it in a couple of sentences.

3) Why is this goal important to you? Explain with a couple of sentences.

4) In an ideal world, when would you like to see this goal achieved?

5) Imagine yourself on the journey to this goal, doing your best to implement your strategies. Then, you experience a setback that affects your desired timeline. Envision what your reaction might be (discouragement, frustration, shame, disappointment, anger, defeat). Think about what your body would feel as you experience this response (tense, heavy, a pit in your stomach, headache).





6) Now, imagine applying a patient response to this setback. How would you like to see yourself respond (with love, self-acceptance, acknowledgement, perseverance, gratitude)? (Perhaps considering how you would counsel someone else to respond to a setback could give you insight here.)

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7) Envision yourself responding in your ideal way. What do you feel in your body as you initiate this response (peace, relaxation, lightheartedness)?

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8) Fully embrace this moment, allowing yourself to reflect back on it the next time you have an opportunity to extend patience to yourself and your situation.

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Questions to Build Hope

Questions That Promote Hopeful Conversations about Existential Thoughts

Having the conversation—the power of being there.

While Christians believe in the hope that comes from Jesus Christ and the vision that God is working toward a fulfillment of all creation—a consummation—those who no longer believe in God might need other ways to regain hope in their lives. Research shows that mentors, family, and the broader community are vital to well-being. We need others to know us and accept us for who we are. We can also ask questions that can help our loved ones process their feelings and we can model how to live.





Question 1: Who am I?

- Tell me who you are at this moment. What are some ways you would describe yourself?
- What are you good at? Can you recall when you were doing something that you liked so much you lost track of time? What was it?
- What do you care about?
- How are you similar and/or different from your parents? Siblings? Best friend?
- What influence do your peers have on how you see yourself?

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Question 2: What is the meaning of life?

- At the end of your life, what would you like people to say about you? What kinds of contributions would you like to have made? How would you like people to talk about how you showed up for them?
- How do you understand suffering in the world? How do you make sense of it? Do you think we have a responsibility to try to help others who are suffering?
- Do you think humans were created for a purpose?

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Question 3: Are we really fundamentally alone?

- Who are the people who are most important to you? How much time do you spend with them each week? Tell me a little about what you talk about. Do you feel like they know you? Are you able to be truthful with them?
- What are the things that get in the way of your ability to be fully open and honest with trusted friends or family?
- When you feel lonely, what are you most longing for?
- Do you think it's important for people to have values about how they treat other people? For example, do you think being honest is important? Do you consider other people's values and ideas when you make decisions about your own life?

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Question 4: When I die, where will I go?

- Do you think humans have souls, or something in us that longs for spiritual connection?
- What do you think happens to that part of us when we die?

Helping people to answer these existential questions can help them regain hope. Figuring out how we want to live and create meaningful lives can direct people toward purpose. A reassurance that feelings of happiness will return and that we can adopt practices to access positive emotions can help us become more resilient to suffering. Living in the present and experiencing a sense that we are all deeply interconnected can provide a profound source of hope.





Values-Based Living

Identifying your values to figure out how you would like to show up in pursuit of what matters most to you

By Lauren Van Vranken

Intro to the Values-Based Living worksheet

Responding to change with openness can help our nervous system slow down, connect to the present moment, and recenter ourselves in our values. When the unexpected occurs, it is even more critical to tend to ourselves with compassion and kindness, rather than jump to conclusions or become stuck in a cloud of anxiety.

Explore the following practice to cultivate new patterns that allow you to open, be present, and centered in your values.

- Sometimes we focus on checking off our To-Do lists or reaching the next goal, yet forget it is important how we show up as we pursue those things.
- In each of the 12 domains listed below, reflect on areas that are relevant to you. Identify your current concrete goals, and reflect on the values that you align with – consider these to be the direction you are moving toward in your pursuit of what matters, especially during times of change.
- By being engaged in our values, we are able to be more present and centered in our lives.





Concrete Goals

Consider an action that has a clear ending point, like completing a certification, making a phone call, etc.

Values-Based Direction

Consider *how* you would like to show up in small consistent ways as you pursue the things that matter. Consider: *How* would you behave? Examples are listed [here](#) – choose from the list and/or add your own!

VALUES DOMAIN	CONCRETE GOALS	VALUES-BASED DIRECTION
Relationship with Family (consider sibling, parents, grandparents, etc.)	e.g., Call sibling 1x week, visit parents, plan family meal, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being supportive• Nurturing• Affectionate• Being generous• Grateful• Authentic• Reliable• Humorous• Flexible• Assertive• Kind• Honest
Intimate/Romantic Relationship (with partner, spouse, etc.)	e.g., plan weekly date night, get engaged; listen and ask good questions, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being trustworthy• Fully engaged & present• Sensual• Supportive• Kind• Accepting• Honest• Fun & playful• Intimate





VALUES DOMAIN	CONCRETE GOALS	VALUES-BASED DIRECTION
Parenting Relationship with Children	e.g., become a parent; prioritize more time with children; read bedtime stories, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being loving• Present & engaged• Open & curious• Celebrating unique identities• Patient• Encouraging• Consistent• Adventurous• Caring• Affectionate
Relationship with Friends	e.g., stay in contact with college friends; check-in with close friends weekly; plan birthday party for friend, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being fun-loving• Compassionate• Forgiving• Friendly• Encouraging• Engaged & present• Caring• Accepting
Relationship with Work, and Work-related relationships	e.g., maintain 40-hr work week; respond to emails promptly; become manager; collaborate on upcoming project, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Authentic• Kind• Assertive• Fair• Collaborative• Skilled/skillful• Responsible• Reliable• Honest• Mindful• Hardworking



VALUES DOMAIN	CONCRETE GOALS	VALUES-BASED DIRECTION
<p>Pursuing Education, Skills Training, Personal Growth</p>	<p>e.g., complete master's degree; complete specialized training; work with executive coach, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orderly/organized • Connected • Authentic • Flexible • Persistent • Responsible • Timely • Mindful • Respectful • Curious • Reflective • Open
<p>Pursuing Recreational Activities & Fun</p>	<p>e.g., join a softball league or a climbing gym; visit the beach 1x per month, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playful • Connected • Independent • Agreeable • Non-judgmental • Respectful • Skillful • Courageous • Open
<p>Pursuing Spirituality (religious or non-religious beliefs and practice)</p>	<p>e.g., practice meditation; attend religious service; pray, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peaceful • Mindful • Present & engaged • Curious • Being compassionate/ self-compassionate • Accepting • Intimate • Loving • Generous • Grateful • Free

VALUES DOMAIN	CONCRETE GOALS	VALUES-BASED DIRECTION
<p>Pursuing Community (consider community-oriented activities, e.g., volunteering, activism, self-help groups, etc.)</p>	<p>e.g., support local pet shelter; volunteer with local nursing home; join neighborhood council; attend AA, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helpful • Kind • Curious • Generous • Courageous • Supportive • Open
<p>Pursuing Physical Health, Mental Health, Self-care</p>	<p>e.g., join gym; walk daily; practice yoga; eat balanced meals; cook at home; work with therapist, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent • Present & engaged • Curious • Adaptable • Flexible/Open to change • Persistent • Courageous
<p>Pursuing Sustainability/Care for Environment</p>	<p>e.g., recycle bottles & cans; participate in neighborhood clean-up; shop at thrift store; donate to environmental non-profit, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive • Giving / generous • Cooperative • Helpful • Collaborative • Interested • Connected • Resourceful • Respectful
<p>Pursuing Creativity & Beauty</p>	<p>e.g., practice watercolor painting; read/write poetry; attend concert; visit museum; learn to knit; take photography class, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative • Innovative • Skillful • Expressive • Free • Authentic • Industrious • Artistic • Committed



Questions to Promote Love, Meaning and Purpose

Pivot from anxiety to meaning to discover yourself and your purposes. Find a trusted friend or small group and work through these questions.

By Dr. Pamela Ebstyne King

Thinking through paths out of anxiety and fear:

If it rings true for you that you need to train your brain to tone down anxiety and/or discover more about yourself – your sources of love and mattering, and your purposes – find a trusted friend or loved one or a small group and work through some of these questions together.





Getting in Touch With Love

Before we begin our training on patience, take a moment to reflect on the following questions. There are no right or wrong answers. This exercise is a personal assessment meant to stimulate your thinking about patience. Be as specific and detailed as possible with each answer you provide.

1) What are your fundamental beliefs about being loved—for just who you are? Not what you do, but just who you are now?

2) Pause. Close your eyes, take 3 slow breaths—imagine God is looking at you and beholding you. What does God see? What are God's yearnings for you right now? How does God desire for you to experience that you are God's wonderful creation (Psalm 139)?

3) When do you tend to feel most loved and alive? What kind of pace and space do you need for more of these experiences?

4) Who makes you feel more loved and alive? How?





5) Who do you sense that you make feel more loved and alive? How?

6) What gets in the way of you feeling loved and living as if you are deeply loved and treasured?

7) What does this tell you about your life?

Taking Stock of Anxiety

1) When you slow down and get quiet, do you feel or sense anxiety in your body? When you tune into it and allow yourself to feel it, what is it telling you?

2) When or where does anxiety show up? What gets you spinning?





3) Are you particularly afraid of disappointing others? Why do you think that is so?

4) Do you avoid rocking the boat? Upsetting certain people? What is the specific fear? Name it.

5) Do you avoid situations where you might fail? Again, name the fear.

6) Do you hold on to beliefs and stories that keep you anxious or stuck?





Growing Forward

1) Do you take time for rest and sabbath? If not, how can you create space for rest?

2) Are you able to set aside time to consider your needs and desires? If not, what practices can you put into place to make time? We recommend the **5 A's** or the **Examine Prayer** for starters.

3) Do you have safe spaces where you can be yourself without pretending?

4) Is this a season to seek out someone who is a safe space for you to share life with? Who might that be? A friend, parent, sibling, pastor, mentor, **therapist**? How can you deepen a relationship with someone who would understand and care for you—your needs, desires, and vulnerabilities?





5) Who needs your support? Do you let people know that they matter to you?

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6) When disappointments occur, do you take time to make sense of them in terms of your beliefs and values? What practice could you put in place to make meaning out of disappointments?

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7) What do you value most in life? Is your life aligned with your values?

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If fear and anxiety seem to be especially pertinent to you, or are getting in the way of you finding spiritual health and thriving, we recommend that you seek guidance from a spiritual director, pastor, counselor, or therapist. In addition, you can find further resources online at the Henry Nouwen Society. They offer five meditations on moving from fear to love.

