

The Christian Companion to Designing Your Life

By Dave Evans

Foreward – Designing Your Life for Christians

The book, *Designing Your Life (DYL)*, is written to provide readers of all ages and situations a practical and hopeful set of ideas and tools that comprise an effective methodology for life and career wayfinding using the innovative principles of design thinking. More simply put – DYL helps you use design tools to figure out what you want to be as you grow up.

The challenge of life design is of keen importance to Christians, who sincerely desire to effectively discover and live out God’s will for their lives and to make their lives count. This Companion is written to Christian readers of *Designing Your Life* to help them understand how these design principles integrate into the biblical process of Christian discernment and to get the most out of what *Designing Your Life* can contribute to their Christian understanding. As this document will hopefully make quite clear – everything in *Designing Your Life* is completely compatible with Christian faith and the tools in DYL are a powerful help to faithful Christians everywhere to be more effective and productive as they seek their life and career path.

This document is structured in a first person Q&A conversational format, addressing the issues I most often hear on the minds of Christian readers. Feel free to jump around and find the information most relevant to you. Then – enjoy *Designing Your Life* and the adventure of co-creating your future in collaboration with God through the Holy Spirit.

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1. Designing Your Life is a “design” book, how is it also a “Christian” book?

Great question – and to properly answer it, we need to turn the clock back for a short look at the historical roots of a misunderstanding (what DYL calls a dysfunctional belief) that informs this question.

Starting back in the 3rd century, the practice of Christianity began adopting a distinction between “sacred” activities (like church, prayer, and mission) and “secular” activities (like cooking dinner or selling insurance). The sacred activities were most easily recognized by their cultural distinction in language, ritual, and location (eg: church). Secular activities were engaged in by Christian and non-believing persons alike, described in non-religious language, and often led by non-Christians. Since neither most of the people doing these things nor their approach in doing them explicitly acknowledged God, it looked like God was absent from them. Secular came to mean an essentially godless endeavor. This is a profound error – most often called the sacred-secular gap – which has plagued the faith for over a millennium.

As Abraham Kuyper, the influential theologian and Prime Minister of the Netherlands (1901-05), declared, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence...” over which Christ is not sovereign. There are certainly places and activities in which God is not acknowledged or recognized, but there is no noble effort on earth that is not of God. All truth is true and all truth is of God – whether it sounds religious or not and regardless of who speaks it. Of course it matters whether or not someone is faithful, but the absence of a faithful participant or an expressly Christian approach does not evict the presence of God’s Spirit nor indicate God’s disinterest. Fortunately in recent years, Christianity has been moving steadily away from this misunderstanding and embracing a broad engagement with God’s dream of human flourishing in all its forms. Numerous articles and good books are now available addressing this issue (eg: *Culture Making* by Crouch, *Every Good Endeavor* by Keller & Alsdorf, or *Fabric of Faithfulness* by Garber). Now leaving the sacred-secular gap behind us and free to embrace all noble truth religious and otherwise, let’s address how Designing Your Life, based on the premises of design-thinking is an appropriate book for Christians.

It all hinges on what we mean by “design thinking”. Design-thinking is the currently popular name for a specific approach to problem-solving Stanford started developing over 50 years ago originally named, and still correctly referred to as, Human-Centered Design or HCD. Previously, the field of design (graphic design, product design, automobile design...) had been centered in craft – the ability to draw and sculpt beautiful, practical things. Stanford’s approach shifted the perspective substantially, perceiving that what was needed was not just an artistic skill but a doable and repeatable process for coming up with good products that engineers really could make and people really would be able to use naturally and effectively. To do this, the process needed to be grounded in how people actually have ideas (so we could be good at having lots of them and better ones) and how people actually used things (so that what we built would work well and serve them). That mindset drove the development of Human-Centered Design (HCD) – today most often referred to as “design-thinking”.

Design-thinking is now globally recognized as a powerful tool for innovation, especially for solving “wicked problems”, the kind of problems that don’t readily lend themselves to easy answers with equations or spreadsheets – essentially human problems.

Refined over decades and proven thousands of times in practice on an astonishing array of challenges, from human computer interactions, to education, to medical devices, to life and vocational wayfinding, design-thinking has demonstrated its efficacy in leveraging human creativity to develop useful solutions that really work for people. Simply put design-thinking - when practiced well - helps us be more human.

Being more human is exactly what God has called all of us to be. Every one of us contains within us the image of God (*imago Dei*). When we become our best selves – our most human selves – we are leaning into God’s intention for us. The hope God has had for humanity from the start - to live in harmony with one another and in stewardship toward our world – is the fullest and truest expression of what it means to be authentically human. All our failings and shortcomings, while heartbreaking and even tragic, do not define our best selves (quite the opposite). As Paul reminds us in the letter to the Philippians (4:8-9), “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” All true, right, and excellent things ennoble us and the practice of such things with a properly focused mindset will bring us nearer to God and God’s intentions for us and those we serve.

God is often referred to as The Great Designer or The Creator. God started the Maker Movement a very very long time ago. In deeply understanding how humans make and use things, design-thinking acts as a catalyst to allow us to be better at being human while doing the very human thing – the very God-like thing – of making. It stands to reason that doing a more human job of responding to the profoundly human challenge of figuring out how to apply our lives in the world is a God-honoring endeavor. Despite not having Christian faithfulness expressly in mind when inventing it, the developers of design-thinking methodology created an intrinsically Christian capability by getting the human part right and true. We readily accept that mathematics and gravity are “true” and “of God”. In the same way, the truthfulness of design-thinking glorifies God.

Jesus showed us what it means to be truly human. Becoming fully human is the call to all of us. Design-thinking is just one more tool that we can use to move toward that goal. In the questions that follow, I’ll address the particulars related to Christian vocational discernment and practice and how they intersect with the ideas and tools of Designing Your Life. But at its root, it works because it helps us to respond effectively to God’s invitation to become more human. As Irenaeus the early church Father said, “*Gloria Dei est vivens homo!*” The glory of God is a person fully alive. Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10) . The Westminster Catechism declares, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever”. Becoming fully alive and abundantly human in ways that glorify God is a wonderful invitation to each of us. So let us endeavor well to collaborate with God’s Spirit in designing our own lives to bring that invitation into reality. Designing Your Life is a tool to aid Christians, and all persons, to do just that.

2. Isn't God calling each of us to one preferred will God has in mind for us – how does Odyssey Planning three alternative lives, as suggested in Chapter 5, fit for Christians?

2.a. The Will of God

This is a very important question which I'll break down into four sections. The core issue at stake here is what is the nature of the will of God for our lives. Is it one preferred thing? ... any moral thing? ...one of a select number of things? ...does it change over time? These are big questions about which many books are written on which not all Christians concur. Nevertheless, how each of us decides to answer these questions is crucial in determining how we navigate our lives. Fortunately, the scriptures are a great help to us, and perhaps nowhere moreso than in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. For an excellent and thorough treatment of this topic, I heartily recommend Dr. Gerald Sitter's book *The Will of God as a Way of Life*, which is substantially formed out of Jerry's extensive study of the Sermon on the Mount.

The critical insight is the recognition that God's will is much more *a way than a thing*. Being Christian is more verb than noun, more process than product. Our modern commercially-oriented, technology-accelerated culture has become so dominated by pursuing "the best" of everything that we assume there must be a best, optimized version of our lives too – which of course would be what God wants for and from us. Surely God wants "the best" doesn't He? The trap here is that this point of view forgets two important things: growth and love.

To walk the walk of faith is to be on a permanent growth plan, ascending a never-ending learning curve. Paul reminds us that he is "confident of this very thing – that He who began a good work in you shall perfect it until the day of Christ." (Phil 1:6). Put another way, to know God is to be matriculated for life in the school of the Spirit, growing ever more into our better selves, more conformed to the image of Christ. An important aspect of the will of God for all of us is to continue growing into someone who can better recognize and do the will of God. The just-figure-out-that-one-best-blueprint-for-my-life version of the will of God ignores this dynamic aspect. Who of us at the age of 19 or 22 (or 40!) has yet grown into the person who can fully recognize and appreciate all that God longs to invite us into for the coming 30, 40 or 50 years? The will of God isn't a fixed script, it is a continual unfolding of God's beckoning to us as we follow Him.

God most often seems to work using a just-in-time approach to guidance rather than disclosing the grand plan all at once. God grows in us the capabilities, maturity, and insight necessary for the next step of faith as we need them. Luke 2 reminds us that "Jesus grew..." and experienced this just-in-time encounter with God just like we do, for instance at the wedding at Cana where Jesus discovered the start of his public ministry (John 2).

Secondly the one-best-version-of-life approach to the will of God ignores the primacy of love, which Jesus makes paramount in declaring the two greatest commandments: to love God and love one another (Matt. 22). Love is the heart of the gospel, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3). Love is the very essence of the nature of God (I John), and is to be the recognizable hallmark of the Christian (John 13). Love is not a strategy, a plan, or a blueprint. Love is a way of being in relationship in the world that is inherently dynamic – and it is God's way. A life guided by

love is a life necessarily open to change, so God's will for each of us to live in love does not equate to that will including only one set of rigidly defined possibilities.

A healthy Christian is a deeply loving person who is continually learning and growing in maturity. If by living within the will of God for our lives, we mean aspiring to be someone who fulfills this description, then we are clearly signing up for a dynamic, flexible and changing reality in which there may be many possible right choices before us – not just one best answer at every turn. What are the practical implications of this orientation to the will of God? Dr. Sittser says,

We may have ten important decisions to make and a hundred, possible pathways we could follow. We may wish that God would tell us exactly what to do, where to go, and how to choose. Yet Jesus only requires that we make sure our heart is good, our motives are pure, and our basic direction is right, pointing toward the "true north" of the kingdom of God. We can, in good conscience, choose from among any number of reasonable alternatives and continue to do the will of God. In the end what matters most is that we seek first God's kingdom and righteousness.

God's will is not one perfect original plan conceived in heaven that God hopes you'll figure out before it's too late and you've blown it. God's will isn't as concerned with what you do as the way you are. By following the right way of seeking God first, we are free to make any one of a number of good choices.

... This perspective on the will of God gives us astonishing freedom. If we seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, which *is* the will of God for our lives, then whatever choices we make concerning the future become the will of God for our lives. There are many pathways we could follow, many options we could pursue. As long as we are seeking God, all of them can be God's will for our lives, although only one, the path we choose, actually becomes His will.

Wait a minute - the path *we* choose actually becomes *God's* will – how does that work? It may seem like Dr. Sittser is saying that we, not God, determine God's will, but that's not what he means. He's saying that what God is really after is God-seekers, people living in loving, intimate dependency on God. *That* is what the will of God centrally *is*. But seeking is not the end of it. After we seek, we still must choose, and what happens then? After we choose, whether well or poorly, God accepts our choice and its consequences on us and others. Keep in mind, God's will as originally expressed in creation was to give humans agency and free will in living our lives, and God has not changed His mind about that. God's desire is of course that we choose well by executing our agency in loving cooperation with God, but He frees all persons to choose with or without faith. We directly participate in co-creating the will of God by means of exercising our God-ordained capacity to act as responsible agents whose decisions matter and have real effect.

In other words, God does not have one will for our lives but many wills. For example, God does not have one person selected for you to marry whom you must "find." Instead, there are many people you could marry, if you choose to marry at all. Nor does God have one career mapped out for you that you must figure out. Instead, there are many careers you could do and perhaps will do. Of

course we must still make choices, and some will be difficult to make. Yet we can be confident that what we choose becomes God's will for our lives.ⁱⁱ

This is a strong statement and perhaps a little confusing. I think it will help to insert here a distinction between God's will and alternate plans to act out God's will. God's will as we've defined it here is indeed singularly to seek God first always – to live Godwardly. In lots of situations there are multiple ways to respond to what our God-seeking discovers, all of which may be authentic to us, responsive to the world, and glorifying to God. In that circumstance, unless we discern divine guidance favoring a particular path, we are free to choose which plan to act on and do so with faithful confidence that we are doing the will of God.

The gracious adaptability of the will of God understood in this way is made clear by the negative example of the prodigal son (Luke 15). The prodigal son got himself into a terrible situation by making a series of bad choices that were not rooted in seeking God. But the moment he “came to his senses” and was willing to honestly cooperate with God by seeing things honestly the way God does, he was invited to move forward into the perfect will of God, which at that point meant humbly apologizing to his father, relinquishing his squandered sonship and offering himself as a common laborer. Despite the prodigal son having ignored God's will for some time, God continued at every turn to invite him to live Godwardly (ie: to do God's will fully) with his very next step. While the prodigal son suffered highly consequential errors, he (and we) could never exhaust God's readiness to invite him into living God's will fully starting at any moment and in any situation. God's approval of and affection for the prodigal son at the moment he came to his senses feeding the pigs was no greater or less than it would have been had he made no errors and acted wisely all along. The facts of the prodigal son's life would have been radically different had he acted wisely instead of selfishly (which does matter and matters much!), but as soon as he again turned Godwardly, he was fully approved and “in the will of God.” The errors made by the prodigal son clearly had irreversible consequences. Despite his father's forgiveness, the money he squandered was gone forever and the damage he did while out of control for months on end left a trail of broken relationships and loss. But the important thing was not that he'd blown The Grand Plan for his life. The important thing was that once returned, he could begin again to imagine anew how to design the rest of his life from that moment forward, which was the will of God for him as it is for us.

The negative illustration of the prodigal son helps clarify our thinking about the nature and operation of the will of God, but our concerns here are not primarily about recovering from bad choices. Our concerns here are with making good choices and with forming an accurate understanding of the nature of the will of God so that we can faithfully collaborate with God as we design our lives. What does this understanding of the will of God tell us about how we Christians may confidently use the tools and ideas of Designing Your Life, built on a platform of design thinking?

2.b. Designing Our Lives with God

If the will of God is not just one precise blueprint for our lives and life frequently presents us with multiple God-honoring alternatives, then we need an effective approach for discovering and evaluating which way to go. Once we are released from the burdensome misperception that God wants one and only one version of our life from us, we are freed to embrace the happy (and challenging) news that, for most of us, there are multiple interesting ways we could imagine living. That's not so surprising once you think about it. God is generous and prolific and he has given us His own life. Of course there's more of God's life within us than one lifetime will permit us to express or live out. We will all finish this life with many wonderful experiences and worthy projects untouched. That's what God had in mind all along. One of the joyful gifts God gives to each of us is the inescapable privilege of exercising responsible choice in the face of good alternatives. In the Christian life, choosing between good and bad is important but is usually pretty clear and comparatively easy. The hard part is choosing between good and good. And usually we're choosing between good alternatives of such different nature that you can't really compare them side by side with the same criteria. Life choices are large, complex, intensely personal, and resist being reduced to a spreadsheet or simple scorecard. This is where design-thinking can be of great help.

Remember the answer to question #1 – that design-thinking is intrinsically Christian because it is articulately and empathetically human. It is in the humanness of its approach that Designing Your Life can help the Christian cooperate with God in discerning what to choose. Designing Your Life starts with the human assumption that everyone has more life in them than one lifetime can express. Therefore every person can imagine multiple lives. The Odyssey Planning exercise in Chapter 5 invites you to sketch out three of them. You may think you don't have three alternative ideas about your life, but you do. We've never worked with someone who didn't (and we've worked with thousands of people). We discuss how this works in the book and give specific suggestions for how to come up with those three ideas if they're not jumping to mind.

Just sketching out three ideas can help elucidate which is your preferred way to go, by bringing to your attention experiences or longings that highlight one path over another. When we stop thinking in dysfunctional ways (ie: "There is only one thing God wants for me, so *what is it?!*") and start thinking in more honestly human, and therefore more Christian, ways (ie: "I'm so blessed that God has given me more possibilities than I can ever get around to doing – I guess I'll start by checking a few out and see what I learn and what God shows me."), we can quickly make progress on finding answers. Starting with the wrong question ("What is the one, best, right way to go?") will usually get us stuck – sometimes for a very long time. Starting with a better question ("What's unique and interesting about each of these good possibilities?") will free us to make progress quickly. The Odyssey Planning exercise alone has helped many people get clear on their direction, but usually it isn't enough. It just begins the process that leads to the most important work – prototyping.

2.c. Prototyping – a Christian Discernment Tool

In Chapter 6 we describe how to prototype your life alternatives in two primary ways: prototype conversations and prototype experiences. Prototype iteration is the crucial step in the design process, which flows as follows: First, listen carefully to yourself and the world around you; then decide what problem you're actually trying to solve, then quickly come up with a bunch of ideas (3 at least!); then identify the interesting questions that lie within those ideas and need some exploration; then go *do something in the real world with real people to learn more*. Design-thinking is centrally based on experiential encounter and learning – not just cognitive analysis. You can't design your life just sitting at your desk doing spreadsheets or surfing the web (though spreadsheets and research are clearly part of the process). You design your life by getting out into the world and doing stuff.

The book describes in some detail what we mean by prototyping, what it is and isn't, how to do it, and some examples. I won't repeat all that here. What's key about this for the Christian is recognizing that the primary way God speaks to us about the specifics of our lives is through the lived experience of our lives. We can understand doctrine from the scriptures. We can learn spiritual disciplines from good teaching and can have our hearts opened by good worship, but gaining real insight about the particulars of our lives usually comes through hands-on experiences in the world and with other people. Christianity is an incarnational way of life – embodied and lived. There is always a crucial existential component to mature Christian discernment. The combination of Odyssey Planning and prototyping experimentation provide a creative structure and method to craft experiences in which we can hear our own and God's wisdom speak to us.

In many instances, by the time someone has sincerely developed three truly unique Odyssey Plans and prototyped elements from each one, a preferred picture starts to emerge (which is frequently yet a fourth idea). Christians have often reported to me that their experience of doing this prototyping process prayerfully has brought a definite sense of leading from God. Even when this is not the case – and it by no means always is – the prototyping experience will better empower a Christian life designer to confidently exercise her freedom in making her choice. By having explored the alternatives through prototyping (in addition to research and analysis), she gains greater awareness and appreciation of the nuanced distinctions between alternatives and so is better prepared to discern well.

Let me illustrate. I recall one young woman who had been “pounding the throne of God” in prayer for three years trying to hear God tell her which of two career paths to take – but she'd gotten nowhere. Just four months after we spoke and she began to prototype her alternatives, she was able to prayerfully discern that neither was for her and a third way opened up. Her previous prayers were ineffective because she had not provided the Holy Spirit anything to act on in guiding her. The Apostle Peter illustrates the same thing for us in Acts 10. It was only *after* his live encounter with the Roman centurion Cornelius that Peter was able to receive God's lesson that “there is no partiality with God” (Acts 10). The old saying is true – rudders don't work on boats at dock.

The will of God is a *way*. The Christian faith is *walked*. Jesus didn't ask us to analyze and plan like Him, He asked us to *live* like him. Designing Your Life is a *way* to *walk* out the task of *living* into alternative choices and in so doing provides a powerful vehicle through

which to engage with the Holy Spirit and collaborate with God in directing your life. Christianity is an embodied faith. We came to know what God is really like by encountering a real person actually living with us the way God invites all of us to live. Designing Your Life is an effective Christian discernment process because it relies on engaging real, embodied (incarnational), lived encounters, which is an inherently Christian approach.

2.d. When God Gives No Guidance – What Are We To Do? Does It Even Matter?

For many Christians, finding themselves without any clear sense of spiritual guidance is not a happy situation in which they thrill to the joy of God entrusting them with independent choice. Rather – they feel like something may have gone wrong and either they blew it or God doesn't care about them. This problem calls for a design-thinking reframe. When God puts us in a significant situation with no apparent guidance, it does not mean that God doesn't care or that the decision doesn't matter. Of course it matters! The differences between God-honoring alternatives are real and the consequences of our choices propagate broadly into our and others' lives. Such challenging choices often take different shapes at different stages of life. Coming out of college, taking that research fellowship to do a year of fieldwork in Patagonia versus jumping right into business school to get an MBA *matters*. Staying in the classroom where you love directly connecting with your students versus taking that Principal's job and building a leadership culture that better supports teachers versus jumping into that online education startup where you could build something from scratch and maybe even make some money *matters*. In your late 50's with the kids out of the house, taking that lifelong hoped-for transfer to Beijing or staying put to be nearby during your Mom's waning years *matters*. All these alternatives may fit within the will of God for you, but the differences among them still matter.

How do we interpret such situations and what are we to do? The old idea that God's will is always just one, best, right thing again gets in the way. A side effect of that idea is that anything that isn't clearly part of what we believe is the one-and-only-will-of-God for us must just not be important to God. It's very confusing and disheartening to find yourself facing a truly life-impacting decision about which God appears not to care. Here's the reframe: When God does not offer guidance, it does not mean the decision doesn't matter. *It means that God has chosen for you to choose.* God cares very much about this decision because God cares very much about you and everyone involved in this decision. God also cares that you become a capable and responsible person and a person who has the joy of crafting their own life. So, part of God's gift to you is the joy of fully engaging your responsible freedom – truly being the co-author of your life. For that to happen, you have to do some of the choosing.

God cares so much about this decision that He's decided it's one that you deserve to fully make. God will join you in your decision once it's made, as we discussed above, but God is going to be sure that you get the chance to fully enjoy your free will by allowing you tough choices without biasing you on your answer. Parsing the alternatives will be up to you. If you've designed your way forward to this moment, you'll be able navigate it more easily having had a deeper and broader encounter with the alternatives which will better enable your own wisdom (see Chapter 9 where we discuss choosing).

But... can we ever be sufficiently sure that God is providing no preferential guidance and confidently trust that God wants us to choose freely? How do we know that God wasn't

“speaking” but we just missed it? This conundrum plagues many Christians and raises questions about when to expect guidance, where to find it, and if and how DYL can be of help. Yes – of course we can live with confidence that we’ve done enough in our duty to faithfully discern God’s guidance that we can act without worry. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus specifically commands us to not worry, but to seek God. He didn’t say get an Olympic gold medal in spiritual seeking. He didn’t say do nothing but seek and pray and fast for weeks on end to be absolutely positively sure that you have done every single imaginable seeking thing you could (and then some just to be safe) or it’s your fault. Remember who Jesus was talking to at the time. The audience at the Sermon on the Mount was comprised of everyday folk of a small occupied country. These were oppressed, mostly poor people with few resources and precious little free time away from the incredible burden of just getting by. They were totally average people, not spiritual elites, and Jesus assured these people that they could live and do what He was asking of them. If it applies to them, it applies to us.

The Christian life is a gracious offer of abundant living, not a gotcha game set up to catch lousy seekers. With time and discipline, we grow in our capacity to seek and to discern. I am much better at hearing God than I was 20 years ago, and I trust I’ll continue to get better at it. We are all responsible for developing our discernment capacity, which is a demanding and lifelong assignment. Much has been written on this, see Question #4 for a number of book recommendations. My experience has been that deepening prayer and discernment combined with the enhanced insights obtained from using the DYL tools has yielded a greater sense of guidance. DYL has become a helpful mechanism for me to actively cooperate with God’s leading in my life.

3. Is “designing my life” a good approach for Christians? It sounds like it may be too centered on me and too little on faith and the Spirit.

If you’ve not read the answers to Questions #1 and #2 yet, you might want to do that now. Addressing this question will be much easier with that information in hand first. Designing Your Life is an entirely Christian book in that it applies in its entirety for Christians and is entirely compatible with the doctrine of Christian vocation and discernment. It is not *exclusively* nor *exhaustively* Christian however, and we need to understand what that means in order to properly access DYL from a Christian perspective.

DYL is written for everyone – of any age, situation, or worldview. It works for anyone who sees the efficacy and sensibility of its approach and is willing to try it. Of course not everyone will agree that this is the life design method they want to use, but it *can* work for *anyone*. Accordingly, it’s written in ideologically neutral language. It carefully leaves no one out and allows for people of all convictions and belief systems to use it without having to give up their point of view. My collaborator and Co-Founder of the Stanford Life Design Lab, Bill Burnett, and I crafted Designing Your Life with this in mind. Bill and I represent different points of view. I’m a believing Christian. Bill is a non-believing humanist and existentialist. In DYL parlance – we have radically differing Lifestreams and very complementary Workstreams (see Chapter 2 to expand these terms further). Both Bill and I deeply revere the value and sanctity of each human person and have a great regard for empathetically understanding how people and the world really are and work. We, and much research in positive psychology, recognize that for people to live

authentic and meaningful lives they need to be able to align who they are, what they believe and what they're doing. We call this alignment *coherency*. Designing Your Life is organized to help people design and live a coherent life, no matter what they believe.

A coherent life is exactly what God calls us to live. We are to “walk our talk”. We are to live lives that represent what we believe and to be a “living testimony” of the faith. We are not to be double-minded but to have a pure heart and a transformed mind so that our faith and our works are in alignment. These are the more familiar Christian ways of describing what DYL calls living coherently. The process of designing a coherent life is not fundamentally different for people of other convictions than Christianity. The fact that Designing Your Life is compatible with non-Christian points of view makes it no less efficacious in Christian practice. It is entirely Christian but not exclusively Christian.

Because of this inclusive approach, DYL uses universal language to discuss issues that Christians typically describe in faith-specific language. When ideas are presented without the reassuring container of faith-specific language, Christians may be skeptical that the ideas are in fact faith-compatible. It takes some work to become comfortable talking about Christian matters without using familiar Christian jargon. Being “encouraged to live coherently” sounds pretty different than “being exhorted to pursue faithfulness” – but in fact they mean the same thing.

DYL is also not exhaustively Christian – but nor is any book. By “not exhaustively Christian” I mean that DYL does not provide the Christian reader all the information necessary to complete the reader’s life design project. There is much that DYL instructs readers to do that readers need additional information and support to complete, such as how to write a resume or how to pick a mentor or how to obtain trustworthy spiritual insight by prayer. Any book, and certainly one about life design, relies on obtaining resources from outside the book. For the Christian reader of DYL, what’s primarily missing (or non-exhaustive) are faith-specific forms of practice and wisdom especially related to prayer, counsel, and guidance. There are many excellent Christian books on these topics that would provide a fine complement to DYL. In addition to Sitter’s book, I would gladly recommend *Hearing God* by Willard, *The Call* by Guinness, *Listening Hearts* by Farnham et al, *Calling* by Labberton, *Prayer the Great Conversation* by Kreeft, and *Let Your Life Speak* by Palmer – among many, many others.

Not being exhaustively Christian (ie: not addressing every question a Christian DYL reader might ask) does not diminish in any way what the DYL tools and ideas can contribute to a Christian user. When writing DYL, we had to decide what not to include, just as does any writer of an explicitly Christian book.

Returning to the original question, is DYL “too centered on me and too little on faith and the Spirit”? I respectfully suggest that the answer is no. The activities and steps of the DYL methodology will prompt a distinctively Christian response from the Christian reader. DYL just doesn’t provide the specific details of the Christian form of all those responses. All readers of DYL must take on the task of implementing life design in a manner coherent with their beliefs and values. See Question #4 for specific examples of where DYL prompts a Christian form of response.

4. What about prayer, the bible, the church and all those important elements of the Christian walk of faith – where do they fit into the DYL methodology?

[Note: the response to Question #3 above sets the stage well for this question.]

Uniquely Christian elements of the practice of Christian faith are called for all over the DYL methodology, though not by traditional Christian names. DYL encourages coherent (faithful) living (see Chapter 2), which suggests an effective Christian life designer will need to construct all the elements that go into a mature Christian practice. Only with the support of a coherent Christian lifestyle will the tools and experiences that DYL provides be of maximum, useful value to a Christian.

DYL encourages discerning decision-making employing multiple ways of knowing, including spiritual knowing (see Chapter 9). So an effective Christian user of DYL will need to invest in learning Christian discernment, developing a life of prayer, and growing in wisdom – all of which will be crucial to good decision-making. DYL encourages working in community and recommends the importance of good counsel and mentoring (see Chapter 11). To successfully take that recommendation, Christian users of DYL will be advantaged to be in regular fellowship, have a trusted circle of faithful friends, and surround themselves with wise mentors.

So, when a Christian seriously applies the DYL methodology to his faith, DYL will send him back to prayer, the scriptures, and his community of faith time and again. It just won't use those terms or specify those forms, which are left to the reader to determine. I have experienced this directly. Teaching Designing Your Life has been the single most powerful accountability tool in my own faith that I have ever experienced. In fact it was my experience of teaching the precursor course to DYL at Cal that drove me to go back to seminary for three years to learn more about prayer, discernment and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It's my sincere hope that using Designing Your Life will be a faith-enhancing experience for Christian readers.

5. Have Christians been using Designing Your Life and doing so effectively?

Yes. Many of our DYL students at Stanford have been Christians. They often will share their faith perspective with me privately in office hours and regularly report how well integrated with their faith they find DYL to be. The Center for Faith and Work in New York has sponsored two DYL workshops in 2015 and 2016. These events were open to the public and attended by a quite diverse group, including many Christians – who again reported being very able to naturally integrate DYL into their Christian practice and understanding.

6. Who is Dave Evans and is he a credible Christian voice on these matters?

You deserve to know who this guy is and where he's coming from. So, at the risk of providing too much, here's the story... I have been working on and teaching about faith-and-work, vocation, calling and discernment for over forty years. It began as a college student in the '70's wondering how to figure out what God wanted me to do with my life. I noticed that the only Christians confident that they were "doing God's work" were those doing explicitly serving-oriented careers like teaching, medicine or especially pastoring. The other 90+% were a little ambiguous about the Christian significance of their "secular" careers and lives. That made no sense to me. Clearly, God's people would be engaged in all types of roles as part of the diverse and complex team of 7 billion people jointly participating in God's grand humanity project all over the world. It seemed crazy to me to think that God was only really approving of a small subset of participants' efforts.

That was my introduction to "the sacred-secular gap" in modern Christendom – the wrong idea (what DYL calls a dysfunctional belief) that God's work is this small subset of helping professions and overtly religious activity and everything else is just a part of the unimportant secular world and doesn't matter. The sacred-secular gap is alive and well still today – and it's wrong. All the universe is God's, including the parts run by people who may not acknowledge or seek God. The God-filled world is in fact the entire universe, so all noble work is part of God's goal for human flourishing. Understanding, advocating for, and teaching a comprehensive and integrated understanding of God's invitation to all forms of noble work has been central in my ministry since I was 19 (44 years ago).

I was a leader in my Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship chapter as a college student. I continued teaching as a lay leader and elder in my local congregations and was a dean in IVCF's Marketplace Ministry national conferences the '80's. I have continued to partner with IVCF, having just led a West Coast staff training in Spring '16. I have taught and mentored in numerous business ministries, such as Silicon Valley Fellowship, and the [Praxis Labs](#) incubator. I've led countless retreats and seminars. Along the way, it became clear to me that prayerful discernment was a crucial capability for a mature Christian, so I completed a graduate certificate in the Program in Christian Spirituality (PCS) at San Francisco Theological Seminary (2001). In 2011, I keynoted the first [Believers in Business](#) Conference in New York, hosted by the Yale School of Management Christian Fellowship. Since 2013 I have been a Strategic Advisor for Vocation and Formation at [Fuller](#) Seminary, and have published in [Comment](#) magazine. In the Spring of 2016, I completed a 3-month engagement as the inaugural Entrepreneur in Residence (EIR) at the Center for Faith and Work ([CFW](#)) of Dr. Tim Keller's Redeemer Presbyterian Church of New York City.

That's the background that in 2007 brought me to found the [Life Design Lab](#) at Stanford with Bill Burnett, the Executive Director of the Stanford Design Program. Our work is now expressed in our book [Designing Your Life](#) (available [online](#) and in stores). It's my joy and privilege to bring DYL to all my brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ.

Other Links:

- Dave Evans' Newest Book: [Designing Your Work Life: How to Thrive and Change and Find Happiness at Work](#)
- Dave Evans and Tod Bolsinger on FULLER Formation: [Defining and Finding Your Calling](#)
- Dave Evans' Original Book: [Designing Your Life: How to Build a Well-Lived, Joyful Life](#)
- Dave Evans on YouTube: [Designing Your Covid Life: Generative Acceptance](#)

ⁱ Kuyper, Abraham (1998). "Sphere Sovereignty". In Bratt, James D. *Abraham Kuyper, A Centennial Reader*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. p. 488. (ref:1880 Inaugural Lecture, Free University of Amsterdam)

ⁱⁱ Sittser, Gerald, (2000) *The Will of God as a Way of Life*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000, Chapter 2 (all quotations)