

Chapter 15

What Is Your Next Assignment?

A question that appears in many books about the second half of life is: What do you want to do next? It is not a bad question. After decades of meeting obligations, raising children, building careers, and living by schedules often shaped by others' needs, it can be refreshing to consider what we would actually like to do.

Perhaps you want to travel, write, build something, learn something, start a business, or spend more time outdoors. You may hope to become more involved with your grandchildren or to return to an interest that earlier seasons left little time for. Those desires deserve consideration. Enjoyment is part of receiving God's gifts with gratitude, and His will is not necessarily the option we would least prefer.

Throughout REMAINING, however, we have been learning to view the years ahead as entrusted to us. Alongside the question of what we want to do, we have asked what faithfulness requires. Now we bring that work together to consider a direction for the next season. We have taken inventory, named our responsibilities, and begun making commitments. The next assignment grows out of those discoveries.

The focus of the question has shifted. I am no longer building the rest of my life around myself and then asking God to bless the plan. Instead, I am presenting the plan before Him, willing to have my desires examined and my direction changed. When I use the word assignment here, I mean a responsibility or opportunity we prayerfully undertake under Christ's lordship. Naming one does not mean we have received an infallible message about our future. It means we are seeking to respond faithfully to what we understand today.

The Assignment May Already Be in Front of You

When Christians hear words like calling or assignment, we often imagine something dramatic. Perhaps God will lead us into a new ministry, a second career, or a project that brings together much of what we have learned. Sometimes a new opportunity does emerge. But we should be careful not to become so preoccupied with discovering a new assignment that we neglect the one already across the breakfast table.

Your next assignment may be to love your wife more intentionally during a difficult season. It may involve caring for an aging parent, supporting an adult child in a way that respects his responsibilities, or being more present with your grandchildren. You may remain in your current job

while giving greater attention to developing people. The change may be in how you carry out an existing responsibility rather than in the responsibility itself.

There may be an apology to offer, a pattern of generosity to cultivate, or a place in your church where your help is needed and welcome. For a man recovering from illness, the next season may require accepting care, focusing on recovery, and allowing others to shoulder responsibilities he can no longer manage alone. These are real circumstances in which to trust and follow Jesus. We do not need to add a project to make the season count.

An assignment does not become important because it is visible. Luke tells us that Jesus was about thirty when He began His ministry (Luke 3:23) and describes His earlier life in Nazareth as marked by submission to His parents and growth (Luke 2:51–52). The Gospels offer few details about those years. We should not fill that silence with imagined accomplishments, nor should we mistake limited public attention for a life lacking significance. Our quiet responsibilities deserve faithful attention.

Caleb Was Still Looking Forward

Caleb offers a striking picture of faithfulness in later life. In Joshua 14:6–14, he recalled being sent to explore the land at forty. Most of the spies discouraged the people, but Caleb followed the Lord wholeheartedly. Now, forty-five years later, at eighty-five, he stood before Joshua, remembering the promise about his inheritance.

Caleb said:

“Now then, give me this hill country about which the LORD spoke on that day.” — Joshua 14:12, opening excerpt (NASB 2020)

He was still looking forward. Yet the details of his story matter. Caleb was acting on a specific promise tied to Israel’s possession of the promised land, and he expressly said he still had the strength for the task. This was not a general command for older people to attempt what their bodies could no longer bear. Nor does his inheritance become a promise that every ambition we adopt will succeed.

What interests me is his willingness to respond to God amid the circumstances before him. His age had not rendered the Lord’s promise irrelevant. He remembered what had been given to him and remained ready to act. We can learn from that trust without turning his hill country into a demand that every man find a mountain to conquer.

Some readers will have the energy to undertake work they could not before. Others will have less strength and fewer choices than expected. Faithfulness is appropriate in both circumstances. Caleb’s

story invites us to consider our response to God; it does not provide a standard for judging another person's capacity.

Assignment Is Not the Same as Achievement

Our culture teaches us to recognize accomplishment by titles, revenue, awards, promotions, and visible results. God's assignments are not always measured by those standards. A man may spend his final working years developing someone who eventually leads an organization more effectively than he did. There may never be an award for that. A grandfather may patiently teach Scripture and answer questions, unaware of how his grandchildren will later remember those conversations.

A husband may recognize that caring for his wife is the central responsibility of this season. From the outside, his world may seem smaller. Within that life, he has daily opportunities to practice patient, selfless love. He may also need help and relief from others. Faithful care does not require pretending that exhaustion is strength or that accepting help is failure.

This distinction protects us from turning the next assignment into another achievement contest. In Chapter 3, we considered the security of belonging to Christ. We do not need an impressive purpose to prove we matter. That security frees us to serve without insisting that the work establish our importance.

Results still deserve attention. We should ask whether our help is effective and whether we are honoring our commitments. But we cannot control another person's growth or guarantee a ministry's outcome. Our responsibility is to serve honestly, identify where correction is needed, and entrust to God what is beyond our control.

Look at What Is Already in Your Hands

One reason we built the Entrusted Inventory is that opportunities for service often become clearer when we pay attention to what is already around us. Review the abilities you have developed, the people who trust you, and the resources you can responsibly make available. Consider which lessons from your life could help someone else and which responsibilities need more of your attention.

An ability can be easy to overlook because it feels ordinary to you. You may explain complex matters clearly, repair things patiently, organize work, or help a discouraged person feel heard. The fact that you have done something for years does not make it insignificant. Nor must you use every ability in every season. The question is where something entrusted to you can meet a real need.

Ask the people concerned what help would be useful. A younger colleague may welcome a conversation without seeking a formal mentor. A church may need dependable help with an existing

ministry more than with a proposed program. A family member may need you to listen before offering a solution. Discernment includes learning from those we hope to serve.

Not Every Need Is Your Assignment

This can be difficult for responsible people. If you are accustomed to solving problems, you may see a struggling organization, a failing project, or a family crisis and feel compelled to step in. Sometimes that instinct reflects generosity. Other times, it reflects a habit of assuming responsibility that belongs to someone else, or a reluctance to believe the work can continue without you.

The fact that you can do something does not necessarily mean you should. A request deserves consideration, but it does not, by itself, constitute an assignment from God. Our capacity is limited, and saying yes consumes time and energy already committed elsewhere. A worthwhile opportunity may need to be declined because another responsibility has a stronger claim on us.

That does not make convenience the measure of faithfulness. Love sometimes calls for interruption, a costly commitment, or help we had not planned to give. We need to distinguish those demands from the desire to remain indispensable. Pray, examine what Scripture requires, and seek counsel from people who can help you see both your generosity and your blind spots.

If an opportunity will substantially affect your wife or others who share your responsibilities, include them in the decision before making the commitment. Their needs are part of the discernment process, not an obstacle to be managed after you decide. If an existing role must change, arrange a responsible handover rather than leaving someone else to absorb the consequences of your new direction.

Desire and Experience Have a Place

Some Christians assume that enjoying a form of service makes it less spiritual. Yet a man who loves teaching may serve others well through teaching, and someone who enjoys building may find deep satisfaction in using those skills to help a neighbor. Desire deserves attention without becoming the final authority. We still need to ask whether it is being shaped by Christ and whether the work serves an actual need.

Motives are seldom as simple as we would like. We may sincerely want to help and also enjoy being admired. Recognizing that mixture gives us something to bring before the Lord. We can ask whether we remain willing to listen, accept correction, share credit, and do useful work that attracts little attention. Those responses often reveal more than the initial excitement.

Experience also deserves consideration. Joseph's words in Genesis 50:19–21 acknowledge both the evil his brothers intended and God's good purpose in preserving life. The good did not make their

wrongdoing innocent. His story gives us reason to trust God's work amid suffering while cautioning us against claiming to know the purpose of every hardship we face.

Years in business may have taught you leadership. Financial mistakes may have deepened your understanding of stewardship. Caring for someone who was ill may have taught you to stay present even when you cannot fix what is wrong. Those lessons can become gifts to others. They do not require you to call the suffering itself good or to turn every painful experience into a ministry. Some matters may still need healing, and some reasons may remain beyond our understanding.

Consider what you have learned, what you are ready to share, and where additional help or training is needed. Having lived through something can give us compassion, but it does not automatically equip us to advise everyone in a similar situation. We serve more faithfully when we understand both the limits and the value of our experience.

Ask the People Who Know You

We are not always the best judges of our usefulness. Ask a few people who know you well, "Where do you think I am most useful to others?" You might speak with your wife, a close friend, an adult child, a colleague, or someone who has observed you serving in church. Choose people who can speak honestly, and ask what responsibilities or limitations they think you might be overlooking.

Listen for patterns without treating agreement as a message that cannot be questioned. Several people may notice that you make complex ideas understandable or that others trust you in difficult conversations. They may also see that you are already carrying too much. Their counsel can help you recognize a neglected strength or accept a necessary limit.

The aim is to bring your understanding into the light for examination. Wise counsel may support the direction you are considering, refine it, or give you good reason to wait. None of those responses is wasted if the purpose is faithful service.

A Tentative Assignment Is Enough

We sometimes delay because we seek certainty about the entire path. We want to know that the opportunity will succeed and that the decision will still make sense five years from now. James 4:13–17 challenges the presumption that we control tomorrow. We make plans in dependence on the Lord, attending to the good we already know to do. Humility about the future can accompany a definite decision in the present.

There is a difference between a clear Christian responsibility and a particular way of fulfilling it. The call to love our neighbor is not tentative. A decision to volunteer with one organization rather

than another may be. We can test that choice through Scripture, prayer, counsel, and responsible action without claiming certainty that God has appointed this precise role for the rest of our lives.

Scripture describes believers as those “being led by the Spirit of God” (Romans 8:14, NASB 2020). In that passage, Paul speaks of the Spirit’s work in God’s children: turning them from life according to the flesh, enabling them to put sin to death, and assuring them that they belong to the Father (Romans 8:9–16). This is not primarily a technique for discerning individual decisions. The Spirit is actively at work in those who belong to Christ, but that does not make every impression a message from Him. Scripture remains the controlling authority; the Spirit will never lead us contrary to the Word He inspired. As we seek wisdom for decisions Scripture does not directly answer, we pray, submit our desires to biblical truth, seek wise counsel, consider our responsibilities and circumstances, and remain willing to be corrected. We can ask for His help sincerely and act with humility, without requiring a special sign before obeying what is already clear.

You may begin with a single mentoring conversation rather than launching a ministry. You may serve occasionally before accepting a long-term commitment, or write several pages before deciding whether a book is the right project. If the opportunity requires a major move, substantial funds, or a change that affects others, the first step may be to gather information and discuss it with those affected. A small beginning is useful because it lets us learn without making promises we cannot yet responsibly keep.

Afterward, ask what the experience revealed. Was the help welcomed? Did you keep your commitments? What did the people involved say? What did the work cost, and were existing responsibilities protected? Difficulty alone does not prove a direction is wrong, just as enthusiasm or success does not prove it came from God. Consider the whole picture, and remain willing to continue, adjust, wait, or responsibly close the commitment.

Jesus First in the Assignment

Our governing order remains **Jesus > Others > Self**. Love for Jesus gives direction to our work, and love for others shapes how we do it. We are seeking to serve Him with what He has entrusted to us, including the limitations we would not have chosen.

Ask whether the assignment helps you live obediently to Christ or allows another project to take His place. Consider whether the people you hope to serve are truly heard. Would you still value the work if someone else received the credit? Are you neglecting a clear responsibility in favor of a more exciting purpose?

Purpose itself can become an idol. A man can become so determined to discover his great second act that he overlooks those who already depend on him. Jesus does not call us to serve Him by

disregarding His teachings. Our plans remain under His lordship, open to correction and sustained by grace.

You do not need perfectly sorted motives before you can begin. You need an honest willingness to follow, to repent where necessary, and to learn. The Remaining Years Plan offers a practical way to express that willingness. It helps us identify a direction while leaving room for the Lord to redirect us.

Your Remaining Years Plan

My Next Assignment

Bring your Entrusted Inventory and the commitments from earlier chapters into this exercise. You are choosing a focus for the next season, not replacing every existing responsibility or creating a permanent description of your calling. Continuing a current responsibility, recovering, or seeking counsel may be the appropriate focus.

The Assignment Filter

What has been entrusted to me that is relevant now? Include abilities, experience, resources, relationships, and lessons I can responsibly share.

Who is already around me, and what need have I noticed? What have the people concerned said they need?

What draws me to this work? Where do I find satisfaction, and what motives need prayer or correction?

What does my current season allow? Consider health, marriage, family, work, finances, location, time, and support.

What does Scripture clearly require? Which aspects of this decision remain matters of judgment, and who can help me examine them?

Name the Assignment and Its Cost

Write one clear sentence stating the direction you are considering. Name whom you hope to serve and what you intend to do. Keep the language humble enough to allow change. For example: “Over the next three months, I plan to meet with one younger colleague who welcomes help in thinking through leadership responsibilities.” Or: “For this season, my primary responsibility is caring for my wife and arranging the support we both need.”

My tentative next assignment and the season it covers:

The time, energy, money, training, or support this would require:

The responsibilities I must protect and how I will protect them:

What I may need to decline, reduce, or hand over responsibly:

The people affected whom I need to consult, and any agreement needed before I commit:

If the cost exceeds your current capacity or the people involved do not welcome the proposed help, revise the assignment. A smaller commitment, a different form of service, or a decision to wait may be the more faithful response.

One Step and a Date to Review

Within the next seven days, choose an initial action or arrange the conversation needed to decide on it. Aim for a modest step within thirty days, allowing more time if the decision requires it. The step

may test a new opportunity or strengthen an existing responsibility. You do not have to complete the assignment within a month.

The first action I will take and the person I will contact:

The date I will take that step:

The scope I can responsibly offer and any limits I need to explain:

Who will help me review the experience, including someone affected by it:

My review date:

During that review, consider whether the help was useful and welcome, what you learned, and whether you honored your existing responsibilities. Ask what should change without demanding visible results beyond your control.

What I learned and what I will continue, change, postpone, or conclude:

Keep this page with the rest of your Remaining Years Plan. Return to it when circumstances change and on the date you chose. The goal is responsive obedience to Jesus, not stubborn loyalty to a sentence we once wrote.

Still Willing to Follow

I keep returning to Caleb for his willingness to respond to what the Lord had placed before him. Our assignments will differ from his and from one another's. One man may have the energy for a demanding undertaking, while another may be learning to accept help in everyday life. Both can belong fully to Christ. Our worth does not rise and fall with the work we can do.

There is something beautiful about reaching later years with open hands, willing to serve where we can and to receive what we need. We can move forward without trying to prove we still matter. We already know where our identity rests. If God has given us another day, we can entrust it to Him, including what remains unfinished and what we must release.

A final question brings this work into focus: when the remaining years become the completed years, what will it mean to have lived them well? Wealth, influence, and completed projects tell part of a life's story, but they cannot answer that question. Our hope runs deeper than a record of achievements. We want to remain faithful to Jesus, depending on the grace that has carried us this far. That is where we turn in the final chapter.