

The following are a few of my professional thoughts that I have used with university students, postdocs, and young working professionals during my work as a university professor, international speaker, and private consultant, as well as some newer thoughts that Jesus continues to enlighten me with. I hope that they will be useful to you as well, no matter what religious or philosophical preferences you have.

Wise Living: Life is short, so we must live it wisely! There are consequences for every attitude, thought, word, and action --- both in this life and in the next --- so we should make sure that all we think, say, and do brings good to everyone rather than trouble. What use is it to waste precious time and energy on making life miserable for ourselves or anyone else?

Time-Management: Every human being has the same 24 hours each day for the duration of their life. Those who accomplish more work and achieve greater knowledge, skills, and wealth do not necessarily have higher IQs or come from families that are smarter and richer. Rather, they simply use their 24 hours each day in better ways than others do.

Essential Ingredients for Genuine Success: Research in nearly every field has consistently shown that the intensity and wise application of one's passions are the two most essential ingredients for success, irrespective of one's IQ or alma mater. These passions, however, must be genuine and powerful; they cannot be forced or fake. Artificial enthusiasm will never be able to generate enough positive energy and self-discipline to mature someone into a real professional with genuine expertise.

The Value of Expertise in Language: If we want to improve ourselves in significant ways, then we must seek to improve our language. Language determines the breadth and depth of our thoughts, the strength of our memory, the quality of our relationships, and the success of our career. Language is required for thinking, learning, communicating, and working. Language not only mirrors good thought; it enables it. Therefore, we must continually seek to improve ourselves in our native and foreign languages, as well as in the professional language that is required for success in the documents and discourse of our work.

Becoming an Expert of Value: If we want to become true experts (rather than merely pretending to be experts), then we should seek to become experts of great value who can help solve serious problems at local, national, and international levels. This will not only bring us greater meaning, enjoyment, and employment stability, but it will also produce beautiful benefits for others that will make our world a much better place.

Study Wisely: While living in Asia, I often heard parents and teachers nag students continually with commands to study hard. I think much better advice would be to study wisely. There is little value in studying so hard that we wear ourselves out and lose our motivation to learn, especially if we forget everything we studied after our exams. A much better practice would be to learn as much as we can with the least amount of time and effort. Then we can invest the remaining time on other healthy activities in order to keep our life balanced and motivated. Students who suffer from studying hard frequently burn out and then don't study later in life. If studying hard destroys our love for learning, it becomes a very unproductive activity.

Wisest Young People: Without exception, the wisest young people I meet are those who nourish their minds with excellent books, web documents, and the mature advice of wise mentors from diverse fields and nationalities.

Job Selection: The best measure of whether or not we have found the most suitable job for our interests and abilities is neither the size of the salary nor the prestige of the company, but whether or not Monday morning is more exciting for us than Friday afternoon. We will spend far more of our waking hours at work than at play, so it seems prudent to make sure our career choices are ones that make life more enjoyable rather than more unpleasant. Working at a job we hate so we will have enough money to live luxuriously on the weekends and retire early to pursue many years of play does not produce a happy and honorable life that will inspire our children to pursue better lives.

Wealth: Earning large incomes for valuable work is an admirable accomplishment. But when our professional success makes us wealthy, we should make sure our money becomes an asset that benefits us rather than a liability that damages our health, our relationships, and our social value. Far too often, very talented people apply more wisdom to making money than they do to spending it, and thus bring upon themselves considerable trouble that can negate all of the joy they originally achieved from their earnings. As someone who has privately coached high-potential students, postdocs, and working professionals at some of the best companies and universities in the world, my advice has always been the same, no matter what their field or nationality: Give as much attention to carefully spending your money as you do to making it, because income that buys more harm than good is money poorly invested.

Evidence of True Leadership: One of the best measures of talent in leadership is the extent to which we are genuinely loved, respected, and followed by our friends, colleagues, spouse, and children, without any external assistance from rewards or punishments.

Workplace Bonding: If we want to develop deep and healthy relationships with people in our workplace, we should avoid using negative criticism of others to bond us. It will destroy people's trust in us, keep people from opening up to us, and divide the workplace into gossipy groups that look down on each other. An enjoyable workplace that is filled with team spirit and mutual respect can never be created with backstabbing and slander.

Best Chemistry for Friendship: All of the research I have read suggests that the ideal chemistry for a deep, lasting friendship between two people appears to be a strong mix of similarities in backgrounds, personalities, interests, experiences, values, perspectives, aspirations, and other characteristics, plus a few admirable differences that make each person respect and admire the other.

Reliable Feedback on Teaching: As a retired professor, director, faculty selection committee chair, and supervisor, I have come to believe that one of the best ways to identify good teachers is to ask students 2, 5, 10, 20, and 30 years after they have graduated to see who they think were their best teachers and why. If you ask teachers about good teaching, they are likely to share answers that cleverly qualify themselves as good teachers, but students usually know better. Some teachers are genuinely good (and know it), but less-gifted teachers may also be confident and yet continually disappoint students year after year with poor instruction that yields mediocre results. To weak teachers, poor learning results are always their students' fault, believing that their students are stupid, lazy, and immature, and lack the necessary motivation, discipline, and IQ to learn. In contrast, excellent teachers seldom find any of these problems among their students because they know how to win the hearts and attention of their students, and satisfy them fully with the sweet taste of progress, thus rendering any prior weaknesses merely temporary.

Mistakes: We should not fear mistakes. They are simply points of opportunity for growth in new areas. All of us are works-in-progress, so making mistakes along the way is essential for our personal and professional development.

Philosophic Freedom: Philosophic freedom (both religious and secular) is the most important freedom a country must preserve. Every philosophy constructs a different explanation of why the universe exists and how it works, of what produces success and well-being, and of what exists after death. The philosophical choices we make have HUGE consequences for our present life as well as for what happens to us after we die. Every one of us must have the freedom to investigate all of the competing options ourselves and then select the one we trust enough to gamble our present and eternal existence on. If we select false or inaccurate beliefs, then it should be our eternal responsibility. No government, family, or people group should possess the right to make our philosophic choices for us, nor the right to persecute us for what we choose to believe. Every person needs the freedom to make the most important decisions in life on their own, without punishment for their choices from others who are betting their lives on different possibilities.

Keeping Good Causes Good: If we choose to support a good cause, we should keep it pure and genuine so that everyone will benefit from our efforts. Far too often, people allow their visible support of social, cultural, political, environmental, or religious causes to overly inflate their evaluation of themselves at the expense of others they compare themselves with. If our good causes motivate us to devalue others, they cease to be good causes.

Evaluating Motives: If we want to understand people correctly, then we should be careful how we choose to assess their motives. People often attempt to discern the invisible motives of others by simply comparing the motives they have personally experienced for similar actions they see others perform. People who experience a greater degree of pure and admirable motivations, therefore, may find it difficult to identify sinister motives in others since these are largely unknown to them. And people who suffer from less admirable motives may unjustly condemn others by falsely imagining deceitful schemes that only they have personally experienced. It is a great shame when people who have little personal experience with noble motivations imagine that noble desires are impossible and that beautiful words and activities are simply clever disguises for selfish agendas. Falsely assuming that a family member, a colleague, an employer, a company, a politician, or a foreign government has evil agendas, when they actually don't, does more damage to personal and international relationships than we can ever comprehend.

Dangerous Emotions: Anger, jealousy, bitterness, hate, depression, and despair become dangerous emotions whenever we fail to recognize their causes and purposes. They are caused by placing our faith and expectations in people, ideas, and lifestyles that are unable to transform us into the kind of people that God desires us to become, nor able to generate the beautiful life that God desires us to live. The purposes of these emotions, of course, are to alert us to this danger so that we can make the necessary changes to get back on the right track.

Potential for Success: Every human being is born with tremendous potential for success, but many people significantly reduce their potential by adopting harmful perspectives, values, behavior, and lifestyles that they pick up from their surroundings without much thought or critical reflection. Their pride then keeps them in the dark about the danger of their condition because they continually justify their choices by comparing themselves with people who do likewise or others who do worse. Immersing ourselves in the advice and friendship of this planet's most mature people will help us realize our true potential much faster than going with the flow of those who value foolishness.

Maturity: I have continually noticed throughout my life that the most mature people I meet seem to be those who know their Creator, wholeheartedly submit to his rightful Lordship over every aspect of their life, invest quality time in communication with him via prayer and the Bible, and joyfully welcome all of the training they can get from the difficulties he designs to correct their mistaken perspectives, opinions, and lifestyles.

Personality: Many people lose their jobs, fail to get promoted, fail to earn respect, or fail to get hired because of problems with their personality rather than problems with their technical expertise. If the religions, secular philosophies, training techniques, or holistic therapies we choose are not powerful enough to transform weaknesses in our personality into something that is significantly better, then it may be time to investigate other options that will guarantee better results.

Hunger for Love: If we look deeply enough, we will find that nearly all human activity is motivated by an intense hunger to be loved by others. People beautify their bodies to be loved, acquire expensive possessions to be loved, attain prestigious degrees to be loved, and pursue impressive accomplishments to be loved. This is sad because only God can love us enough to truly satisfy our God-given need for love, thereby freeing us from the addiction of needing it from others. Once we connect with God and allow his love to fill us completely, then we can love others generously without expecting anything in return, no matter how unlovable they may be.

Maintaining a Positive Presence: Whenever we are with other people, we should make our words, our attitudes, and our actions positive and beneficial to everyone there, no matter whether or not others in the group have attained the same level of maturity. How much better it is if people experience greater joy in our presence than in our absence.

Human Weaknesses: Rather than taking hate, greed, jealousy, bitterness, anger, immorality, dishonesty, selfishness, and other ugly weaknesses with us to the grave, it is far better to kill these off much earlier so that we might fully experience how beautiful life can be without them.

Plan Wisely for Death: As earnestly as we plan for life, it is vitally important that we also plan for death. Death is the only event in our future that is sure to occur, and yet there are many competing philosophies that postulate very different realities after this event. Consequently, it is extremely prudent for us to consider our options more carefully than anything else we ever consider and then make a choice that we are confident will produce what it promises. We will never face a decision that requires greater wisdom and carries greater risk, so let's make our biggest decision in life our best one.

Sundays: For people who want to know God (the Father, the Son, and the Spirit) more deeply and mature more rapidly into his likeness, Sundays are best spent in prayer, Bible reading, Bible study, Bible memorization, personal worship, church worship, walking or jogging in parks or natural surroundings, in fellowship with other believers, and rest. It is a time for deep reflective thought and rejuvenation of our bodies, minds, and spirits. Choosing to spend Sundays shopping, watching TV, attending festivals, attending sport events, reading the newspaper or secular books, and similar popular diversions will not speed our personal growth but rather keep us ordinary. Those who have higher aims need to invest in higher activities.

Clean and Organized: If our home is clean and organized when we depart for work, it becomes much more welcoming and relaxing when we return to it after a long, hard day than if we were to return to clutter and filth that fills our mind with stress as soon as we open the door. The same is true of our workplace. If we leave the office, lab, or other workspace clean and organized when we leave for home at the end of the day, we will feel more positive and energized when we return to it again. Those who are indwelt by the Spirit of God, and thus being transformed into "new creations" (2 Corinthians 5:17), not only find cleanliness and order increasingly easy and natural, but they also grow in their desire to keep things clean and organized for others so that the entire neighborhood or workplace becomes more pleasant and beautiful for everyone.

Coram Deo: Coram Deo “refers to something that takes place in the presence of, or before the face of, God. To live coram Deo is to live one’s entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God.” (R. C. Sproul). Since God, who created and rules the universe, is omnipresent (i.e., is everywhere at the same time) and omniscient (i.e. knows all that we do, think, feel, and say), it is extremely wise for people to keep this at the forefront of their mind since intimacy with God the Father through the redemptive work of Jesus (God the Son) will enable God’s continual presence in our life to shower us with continual blessings rather than continual wrath when we willfully live in ignorance, apathy, or rebellion against God.

Public Self vs. Private Self: If your private self is uglier than your public self, then invest your time in improving your hidden thoughts and actions rather than waste your time on trying to hide your real self with clever disguises. Why burn yourself out trying to pretend that you are mature and professional when you can allow your Creator to recreate you fully from within so you can actually become mature and professional?

Two Important Considerations for Job Choice: 1) What do you want to be doing and thinking about for 30-50 hours per week for 30-50 years? 2) What kind of people do you want to be with for 30-50 hours per week for 30-50 years? These two considerations are much more important than location, salary, position, and prestige since most of our waking hours will be invested (or wasted) doing something we love (or hate) with others we love (or hate).

Fighting Sin and Cancer: Fighting cancer is like fighting sin. Both can only be defeated through prayer and starvation. Cancer cells hunger for sugar and other dangerous foods, and our sinful nature hungers for unhealthy thoughts and sensations. Weaken both of them with starvation, and then attack them with prayer to keep them permanently inactive. Victory can never be achieved by feeding them regularly with their favorite treats.

Watch How They Drive: We can tell more about a person’s integrity by watching them drive than by reading their resumes or listening to them talk about their accomplishments. When people drive faster than the speed limits, park illegally, or ignore other traffic laws because everyone else is doing it or because their personal interests are more important than the good of everyone, then they are probably not as mature as they mistakenly imagine themselves to be.

Music: Music that benefits us the most is music that praises God, teaches us about God, or directs our thoughts toward God – for this kind of music is the only music that can genuinely heal our body, refresh our mind, and kindle our spirit. Music that excites sinful passions or promotes godless values will not transform us into the kind of people this world needs the most.

Academic Publishing: The noblest aim of an academic paper is to improve the world with more accurate understandings of reality and healthier applications of their findings, since these can move society closer to God and his beautiful desires for our present and eternal wellbeing than papers that are motivated by less admirable agendas can ever accomplish.

Evaluating Academic Publishing: It seems more reasonable to evaluate academic papers (and the researchers who publish them) according to their ability to improve the world rather than by the prestige and competitiveness of the journal that publishes their work, or by the number of papers that cite them.

Intellectuals: Intellectuals should not be measured by their IQ or linguistic sophistication. Their worth can only be found in their devotion to deep thinking for the good of others and their ability to discover powerful truths that can direct humankind in healthier directions. Brilliant thoughts that possess little understanding of reality and little passion or the wellbeing of others cannot accomplish much good.

Ordinary Wisdom vs. Extraordinary Wisdom: Ordinary wisdom cannot generate anything beyond ordinary success. Extraordinary achievements require extraordinary wisdom that is radically superior to the thoughts and perspectives of the educated majority, which pursues wealth, pleasure, and likability as their highest life objectives.

Intelligent Reading: It is better to read the wisest thoughts and observations of great thinkers across the centuries, from diverse languages and cultures, than to limit oneself to faddish ideas in one's own culture, which quickly disappear when the next hot idea replaces them. Limiting one's reading to popular media and current best sellers will not provide enough nourishment to yield a genuinely healthy life, nor develop enough expertise to solve pressing global problems.

Treadmills: I continually find it odd that one of the greatest accomplishments of modern society is the creation of sophisticated machines that enable people to go nowhere at increasingly faster speeds.

Selecting Superior Assistance: If you ever seek the advice of a consultant or the assistance of a counselor, choose one whose god answers prayers, since the answered prayers of an advisor who prays faithfully for you to a god who actually exists will make up for all of the human weaknesses your mentor is sure to possess.

Spiritual Growth Across the Centuries: I have observed in my international conversations and the writings of diverse cultures and generations that whenever people are indwelt by God's Holy Spirit after encountering Jesus and deciding to follow him, God begins to teach everyone the same essential truths, no matter what culture, background, or historical era they have been born into—the only differences being the circumstances that prompted their insight, their depth of understanding, and the language and illustrations they use to comprehend and explain it. The idea that humankind has been slowly evolving over the centuries into something more enlightened and mature does not seem to accurately describe people who know their Creator and have allowed him to mature them.

Choices: Much of our misery in life results from bad choices. Poor decisions make us sick, fat, and ugly; keep us stupid, unemployable, and impoverished; and sabotage relationships with our family, friends, and coworkers. Recognizing the depth of our own foolishness is the first step to salvation from ourselves that can only be accomplished through reliance on Jesus, who can transform us into completely new creations.