

Spiritual Blueprint

How We Live, Work, Love, Play, and Pray

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Liguori
LIGUORI, MISSOURI

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Liguori.org • 800-325-9521

Imprimi Potest:
Thomas D. Picton, C.Ss.R.
Provincial, Denver Province
The Redemptorists

Published by Liguori Publications
Liguori, Missouri
To order, call 800-325-9521
www.liguori.org

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Papandrea, James Leonard.

Spiritual blueprint : how we live, work, love, play, and pray / James L. Papandrea.—1st ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7648-1892-9

1. Christian life—Catholic authors. I. Title.

BX2350.3P34 2010

248.4—dc22

2009044788

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The author gives special thanks to Steve Miller for all the inspiration and advice over the years and for permission to quote from “Fly Like an Eagle.”

Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of the Redemptorists. To learn more about the Redemptorists, visit Redemptorists.com.

Printed in the United States of America
14 13 12 11 10 5 4 3 2 1
First edition

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Contents

Introduction: The Five Homes and the Image of God • vii

1. What Are You? Identity, Vocation, and Occupation • 1
2. A Home for Your Hands: Where You Work • 7
3. Reflection on the Home for Your Hands • 14
4. The Bat Cave and the Dollhouse • 20
5. A Home for Your Body: Where You Live • 23
6. Reflection on the Home for Your Body • 28
7. Walk the Earth: The Kung Fu Factor and the Yoga Experience • 34
8. A Home for Your Mind: Where You Play • 38
9. Reflection on the Home for Your Mind • 43
10. Heart of Glass: The Meaning of Life • 49
11. A Home for Your Heart: Where You Find Love • 54

12. Reflection on the Home for Your Heart • 67

13. Kosher Bacon: The Paradox of the Christian Faith • 72

14. A Home for Your Spirit: Where You Pray • 78

15. Reflection on the Home for Your Spirit • 96

16. Rhythm, Not Routine • 101

17. Reflection: Putting It All together • 107

18. Reflection: Personal Action Plan • 112

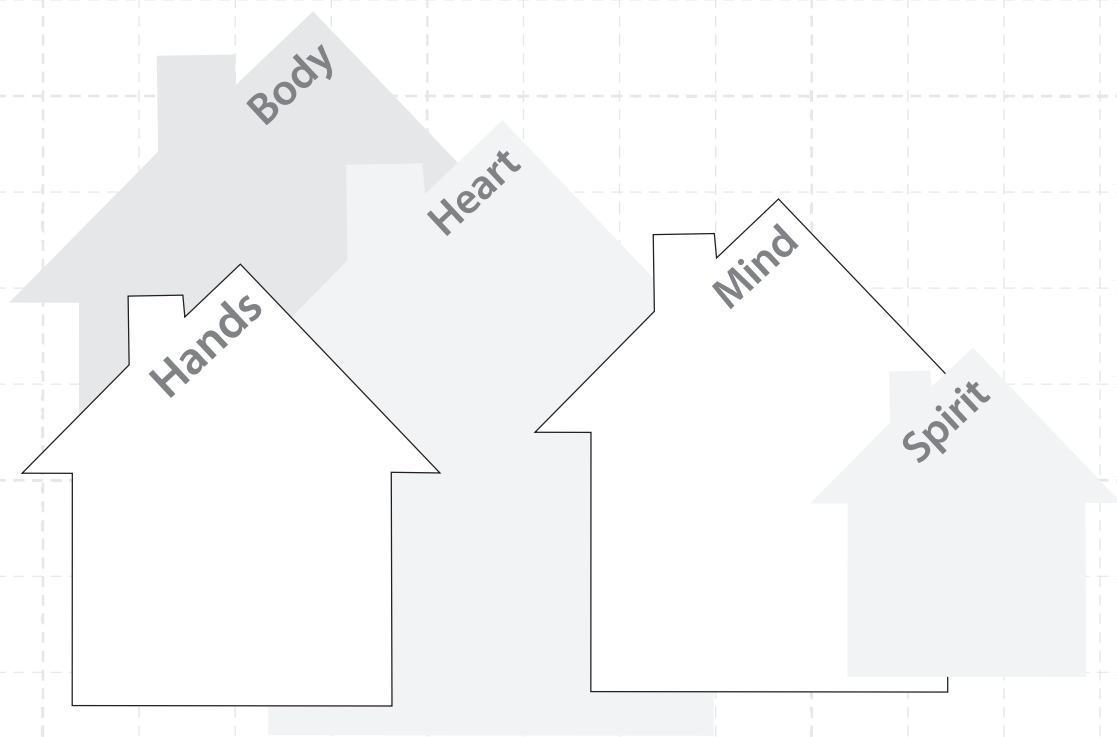
Appendix 1: List of Spiritual Gifts • 135

Appendix 2: Guided Devotional Experience • 137

Appendix 3: The Ecumenical Gratitude Rosary • 139

Appendix 4: Motivational Reminders • 141

Appendix 5: Suggestions for Reading, Watching, and Listening • 143



Introduction

The Five Homes and the Image of God

THE PROBLEM

We live in a world that's over-stimulated and over-stressed. That may seem like an obvious statement, but it needs to be clarified. It is not meant to be a criticism of contemporary society, modern technology, or progress. It is not a melancholy wish for the "good old days" before things got so crazy. Contemporary society, technology, and progress provide us with opportunities that our parents and grandparents didn't have. Some of them are very important, such as developments in medicine and communication. Others are just for enjoyment, such as the ability to carry thousands of songs around with you and listen to them at any time. All these things are good and worthwhile. Therefore the problem is not technology or progress, and the solution to the problem is not found in ridding our lives of modern conveniences or comforts. It is possible to live a life of peace and fulfillment within the contemporary world.

On the other hand, there are things in our lives that cause us stress and rob us of peace. Some of these things come at us from our environment, and some are caused by choices we make and things we do. This book is designed

to help you clarify what aspects of your life cause you stress and rob you of peace, hope, and happiness. Then you will be guided in how to make some changes in your life so that you can live with less stress, more peace of mind, and look forward to a more hopeful future. Of course, change means having to let go of the way things are, and sometimes the unknown can be scary. But don't worry; the journey you will take with this book will allow you to choose what you want to work on first, and you will be able to start with those changes that are the most comfortable.

So if the problem is not technology or the media (although I have my issues with the media), and if it's not the ever-quickenning pace of contemporary culture, what is it? Although these things can contribute to the problem, the actual problem is a lack of order that prevents us from seeing and enjoying the good things in life. In other words, when we experience a lack of peace, hope, and fulfillment in life, it is often because we are overwhelmed by the anxiety that comes from feeling that life is chaotic and out of control. Maybe you don't think "chaos" is the best way to

describe your life, but even if only a few things are out of whack, those things can overshadow the rest of life and prevent you from counting (and enjoying) your blessings. Whenever this happens to any of us, we are tempted to see the glass as half empty—or worse, it feels like the glass is completely empty.

THE SOLUTION

The solution to the problem, then, is to turn chaos into order. In fact, this is what God does when God creates. In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, we are told: “The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). All that existed was chaos, and chaos was all that existed. Then God created order by separating the day from the night and the land from the waters. In a way, this is how you will create order out of chaos in your life, by dividing your life into five areas that you can work on one at a time, and the result will be less anxiety and more peace. When we achieve some measure of order in our lives, we can take stock and evaluate what is good and what needs work. Then we can work on the things that need our attention without feeling overwhelmed.

There is a lot of debate over how to interpret the creation accounts in Genesis. One thing is certain, however. No matter how you interpret the details of the creation story, one of the

most important lessons to be learned from the beginning chapters of Genesis is that we are created in the image of God (see Genesis 1:26–27). But what does it mean to be created in God’s image? Certainly it doesn’t mean a visible or physical image, since God is pure Spirit. But then what *does* it mean? I believe there are five aspects to our humanity that reflect the image of God. As humans, we are: creative, active, rational, loving, and spiritual. Each of these aspects is roughly related to one of five areas of life, or what I call the “five homes.” Every person needs to attend to each one of these five areas of life. In other words, every person needs to build for himself or herself five homes: a home for your hands (where you work); a home for your body (where you live); a home for your mind (where you play); a home for your heart (where you find love); and a home for your spirit (where you pray). As you go through the pages of this book, you will learn what each of these means to you. But first, let’s look at how each of us is made in the image of our Creator.

WE ARE CREATIVE

God is creative, and as humans made in the image of God, we are also creative. Of course we cannot create *ex nihilo*, or “out of nothing,” as God can, but God has given us the ability to create in a way that is like God himself. We can even create life, when two of us get together and a baby is born. But what makes humans truly

unique in the world is our capacity to create and appreciate things designed for their aesthetic value. This includes art but is not limited to it. It can also include crafts, architecture, even elegantly written computer code. I would also say that the act of cleaning something or someplace is an act of creating order out of chaos. The point is that humans create. Birds can make sounds and beavers can make dams, but only humans can write a song or paint a mural or carve a sculpture or build a monument.

Since we are creative as God is creative, we are born with a deep-seated need to find ways to express our creativity. Often, part of the anxiety of our lives comes from a feeling of unfulfilled (or unexpressed) creativity. We will explore the concept of creativity as we look at two of the five homes. The first one will be the home for your hands—your work. But since it is often not possible that a person’s job can completely fulfill his or her need for a creative outlet, we will also explore creativity in the context of the home for your mind.

It should be mentioned that each human is created unique so that there are no two of us the same. God has intentionally made you as a one-of-a-kind masterpiece. You are unique, and you are priceless. That also means there are no two relationships with God that are the same. I will have more to say about this later, but for now it is important to allow yourself the freedom to live a

life that does not have to look like anyone else’s. God does not expect you to conform to anyone else, either in your external life or in your internal prayer life. You are made in the image of God, who is infinite creativity. Therefore, God has given you the great gift of your own individuality.

WE ARE ACTIVE

God didn’t just create the world and then sit back and let it run on its own steam. God continues to sustain the universe and even intervene in human history throughout time. Therefore, God is eternally active. As Christians, we believe that the most important intervention of God in human history was the coming of Jesus Christ. He is the divine Word of God who became human (John 1:14). This “becoming human” we call the *Incarnation*. The Incarnation took place to reconcile humanity to God and establish a new relationship between God and humanity. In order to do that, to interact with humans, Christ had to take on a body as part of his full humanity.

Therefore, in addition to being active, God is relational. In other words, God is not some impersonal force, God is personal and wants to have a relationship with the humans he created in his own image. Similarly, we were created to be active and relational. In fact, we were created so that we are not complete without personal relationships. Of course one of the big differences between us and God is that God is pure Spirit,

2

A Home for Your Hands: Where You Work

WORK TO LIVE

Think about your occupation. If you are retired or between jobs, think about the occupation in which you've spent the most time. Why did you choose that field? Did you intentionally go in that direction, or was it chosen for you? If you fell into it for some reason other than your own choosing, why did you stay? Because it paid the bills? Because it provided security? Because it did more than pay the bills, and it provided a certain standard of living? Or was it because you enjoyed the work?

Why *do* you stay in your current job? Why will you go back to work tomorrow or Monday? Is it simply for the paycheck? Is it because you're good at what you do, and you get some satisfaction out of doing it? Is it because what you do is necessary for society, and you are providing a service that the world cannot live without? Your answers to these questions are not right or wrong, but if you answer them honestly, they will tell you something about yourself. The real bottom line question is, "What do you hope to accomplish with your job?" Think about that for a minute.

When you answered that question, "What do you hope to accomplish with your job?", did you answer it with a long-term answer (save for retirement, accomplish a goal) or with a short-term answer (pay the bills this month, pay for college next semester, fund a vacation)? Again, neither one is wrong. However, the best answer would be a combination of long-term and short-term considerations. Here's another question to ask yourself: "How will you know if you are a success?" Maybe you can already see where this is going. Don't define success only in terms of a long-term goal. You do not have to wait until retirement or until the end of your life to be a success. You can be a success right now. That's because the purpose of your occupation is not at the end of your life, or even at retirement. The purpose of your occupation is to give you a lifestyle, and that means now. But be careful—when you read the word *lifestyle*, does it bring up images of a certain standard of living that includes a particular level of comfort and accumulation of possessions? If so, what are you willing to trade for that kind of lifestyle? Often

people end up trading peace, as they live with a lot more stress so they can provide that standard of living. The question is whether the standard of living is worth the stress, or whether a life with less stress would make a better lifestyle.

Success is not a goal or a destination; it is a way of life. This is good news, because it means that there is really no such thing as failure, since there is always time to start again with a clean slate. Failure is only failure if you quit when you're down. And every time you get up again is another success story. Too many people define success and failure in terms of ultimate goals, and so they deny themselves the joy of living in the present, because they are so focused on (and anxious about) the future. They pressure themselves to work harder and harder out of fear that they might not work hard enough to make it to that goal by which they define success. But life is like the manna in the desert (see Exodus 16). You can't save it for tomorrow. You have to live it today. And so the only real risk of failure is the possibility of looking back on a life that was postponed until it was too late.

Building a home for your hands means investing yourself in an occupation that balances preparing for the future with living life now. For some people, this might mean backing away from aggressively working for future security in order to spend more time (and money) on living now. It might also mean balancing the present

and the future by allowing yourself a healthier lifestyle now and settling for a simpler lifestyle in retirement. All of this requires an element of trusting God for the future, since we cannot control the future, no matter how much money we have. Of course, if you are not saving for the future at all, that can also cause anxiety. Our aim is a healthy balance of living in the present and preparing for the future. Like Goldilocks searching for the happy medium that is "just right," our goal should not be an accomplishment or the end of some process, but a lifestyle of balance along the way. Before we can get into the details of how this might work, we have to take a serious look at how we think about money and finances.

REDEFINING THE CONCEPT OF WEALTH

One of the best books I've ever read on finances is *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*, by Robert T. Kiyosaki. While not necessarily written from a Christian perspective, this book helped me to redefine what I think about wealth and financial success, not in terms of net worth, but in terms of lifestyle. In other words, wealth is not about money in the bank; it's about the kind of lifestyle that one can afford. However, the problem is that most people use their money to buy themselves a stressful lifestyle. Or worse, they buy that stressful lifestyle on credit, and then the debt makes them even more stressed. We may think that more is

better, but in reality, we end up filling our lives with things that actually destroy our peace and happiness.

Our friend Saint Augustine wrote a document called *On the Trinity*, and in that document, he went off on a bit of a tangent in which he said some very interesting things. To paraphrase, Augustine basically said that you *can* have everything you want. You actually can have everything you want! If you don't have everything you want at this moment, then you have two choices. You can try to get more—but be careful—that's a bottomless pit of anxiety, because you will never be satisfied. On the other hand, you can learn to want less. You can have everything you want, if you can learn to want what you have. I know it sounds like another pious platitude, but think about what he's saying. You can be happy with less. This is good news, because less is within your reach, which means happiness is within your reach.

When we connect this idea to the other concept we got from Augustine, that if you love anything other than God you will always live with the fear of losing it, we can see that often the more we have, the more anxiety we have. More stuff means more stress. Of course, he's not saying that owning things is a sin. He's also not saying that having money or expensive possessions is a sin. But if a person spends his career working for the accumulation of money

and an abundance of possessions, then that person is robbing himself or herself of peace and happiness in the present, trading it for the possible goal of some future state that may or may not come.

LIVE WITH LESS, REDUCE YOUR STRESS

The bottom line is that it doesn't pay to chase after money. On the other hand, if you can learn to be satisfied with what you have and to want less—with fewer things comes a lower level of stress. One concrete way to put this into practice is to ask yourself this question before making any major purchase: *Will the enjoyment I get from owning this outweigh the stress it will bring into my life?* We may not realize it at the time of purchase, but often the stress of paying for, using, storing, repairing, or fueling whatever it is will actually overshadow the enjoyment of a thing. Therefore, before making a major purchase, don't think about how much you want it, or how the idea of owning it will make you feel (be careful of connecting your identity to the ownership of anything!), or what it will look like to others that you have it. Think about whether it will bring more stress into your life than it takes away. If owning it will bring more peace than stress (which assumes you can afford it without the stress of debt), then go for it! But if it will bring more stress than peace into your life, you will be happier without it.

Reflection on the Home for Your Hands

SUCCESS IS A LIFESTYLE

What do you hope to accomplish with your job? _____

Short term goals? _____

Long term goals? _____

Describe the lifestyle you hope to live in retirement: _____

Describe the lifestyle you would like to be living now: _____

How is the lifestyle you are actually living now different from the one you would like to live now?

How could you make your lifestyle now more like the one you hope for in retirement?

In what ways could you simplify your retirement lifestyle to enhance your present lifestyle?

On the other hand, are you saving enough for retirement? _____

Would you have to simplify your present lifestyle so that you can maintain your lifestyle in retirement? _____

To summarize, how could your present lifestyle and your retirement lifestyle meet in the middle?

MAJOR POSSESSIONS INVENTORY

Walk around your home with a yellow legal pad. Write down every major thing you own. Include the house itself, and don't forget the car(s) in the garage!

In the margin, give each of your major possessions a rating of plus or minus. Give it a plus if owning it brings more enjoyment and peace of mind than stress. Give it a minus if owning it brings you more stress than peace or enjoyment. Take into account whether you are in debt because of this item. In other words, would you have more spending money without the loan?

Stop and thank God for all the things that have a plus in the margin. Now on a separate page, list all of the things that have a minus rating.

What would happen if you got rid of the things that cause more stress? _____

What would happen if you traded in one or more of your cars for a more modest model?

What would life be like without each one of the things that cause you stress? _____

Which one(s) are you willing to live without, if you could have more peace and freedom? _____

What steps would it take to get rid of these things? _____

ARE YOU IN THE RIGHT JOB?

Do you hate your job? _____

Do you struggle with your colleagues and/or coworkers? _____

Does your job energize you or drain you? Why? _____

Does your job negatively affect your life outside of work? _____

Is it safe to take risks and make mistakes in your job, or do you worry about decisions you make?

Does your job give more stress than satisfaction, or more satisfaction than stress? _____

What aspects of your job would you like to change? _____

What aspects of your job would you like to keep? _____

Would getting a different job mean changing your standard of living? _____

What would that look like? Smaller house? Different cars? Different city/neighborhood? _____

THE IMPORTANT THINGS IN LIFE

What do you think about the idea that living with less means living with less stress? _____

Is your house bigger than you need? _____
