

Workout 1 ▪ Making a Better Life Journey

Prompt, Exercise & Practice for Basil the Great
How to Benefit from Reading Greek Literature

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"Basil the Great is excellent in all his works . . . inferior to none." —Photius (Patriarch of Constantinople)

"Basil started out for his life's work with the equipment of the most liberal education which the age could supply. He had studied Greek literature, rhetoric, and philosophy under the most famous teachers." —Blomfield Jackson

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The following workout is related to Basil the Great's short work, *How to Benefit from Reading Greek Literature*, which may be found in the Cave's *The Best of Basil the Great on Reading Literature and Education*.

To read part of it, go to "Basil the Great" in the Cave Library.

SEE YOUR LIFE as a great journey. Not only your life as a whole but today, this week, this year, and the next handful of years. Do you know where you are going? Today? Tomorrow? Later? And do you know how you will get there? And what about the obstacles that stand in your way? Or the opportunities that will help you along? Workout 1 concentrates on making a better journey.

Let's start off, then, with hearing what Basil the Great has to say about it. "Consider," he says, "if a ship's captain does not randomly deliver his vessel over to the winds without a plan, but he steers the ship directly to port, or if an archer shoots at a target, . . . then what reason would there be for us to be less than such practitioners in terms of the ability to generally perceive our own interests?"

PROMPT ▪ Take a moment to **reflect** on and **jot down some responses** to the following questions. What are your "**interests**" in life? What is **valuable** to you? What **matters**? What are your **goals*** (the **ports** to which you are sailing or the **targets** at which you are shooting)? Do they vary in **significance**? If so, how?

*In answering these questions, keep in mind the various dimensions of your life. Your inner and outer life. Your soul (innermost life) and body. Your health (both mental and physical). Your character (who you regularly, habitually are). Your pursuit of excellence or virtue. Your family and friends. Your education and career goals. Your hobbies. Your involvement in your community. Your life circumstances (where and how you live). Your wealth and possessions. You may also wish to consider your goals relative to the short-, mid-, and long-term.

WORKOUT 1 • MAKING A BETTER LIFE JOURNEY

[illegible]

EXERCISE ▪ To go anywhere, we must know a few things. First, we must know our **starting point**—where we are now. Second, we must know **where we are going**—the port we are sailing to or the target we are shooting at. Finally, we should be aware of the **“winds”** that impact us—anything that will **hinder** us in our journey or **help** us along the way (e.g., no wind at all, stormy winds, or fair winds filling our sails). With these points in mind, answer the following questions. In doing so, we’ll begin to map our life’s journey.

Where am I right now? Where am I in relation to one significant interest or goal I identified a moment ago in the Prompt section? How far off am I from goal—this “port” and “target”?

[illegible]

What are the “winds” that blow me off course in relation to this one significant interest or goal? These “winds” might be feelings, thoughts, or actions, desires or aversions, impulses or temptations, other people (some) or other things—anything that is contrary to you achieving your interests or goals.

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Do I ever “randomly deliver *myself* over to the winds without a plan”?

What “winds” keep me on course? How do they keep me on course? What is your plan to sail with these beneficial winds?

A ship’s captain does not randomly deliver his vessel over to the winds without a plan, but he steers the ship directly to port.”
— Basil the Great, *How to Benefit from Reading Greek Literature*

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PRACTICE • PLANNING THE JOURNEY AND STARTING OFF • Now that you’ve considered your life as a whole, along with significant goals, and you’ve identified the “winds” that might hinder or help you, **write** a **plan of action** toward one significant goal and a **plan of life** for a better life. Each plan will help you get from where you are right now to where you’d like to go (again, relative to one significant goal or your life as a whole). In doing so, try to be as specific, concrete, and practical as possible. Once you have a plan, **practice** (carry out the plan) and **evaluate** your practice as you go. In doing so, you’ll make a better life journey wherever you go.

MY PLAN OF ACTION TO ACHIEVE ONE SIGNIFICANT GOAL

Practice • Evaluate

MY PLAN OF LIFE*

*To see ancient Greek Plan of Life examples, go to the Cave Gymnasium where we’ve posted plans for Homer, Hesiod, the Cynics, Epicurus, the early Stoics, Basil the Great, *aretē*, and happiness.

Practice • Evaluate

3 ACTION POINTS

- **Explore** your life in terms of what is valuable to you (your interests) and what goals you have (both short and long-term). These are your “ports” and “targets.”
- **Deliberate** about how to achieve your goals and hit your targets. **Reflect** on where you are right now, where you are going, and the things (“winds”) that will help or hinder you on your way.
- **Plan** your journey and launch. **Practice** your plan of action or plan of life. **Evaluate** your practice.

Extra Space for Answers and Journaling

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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