

# GOD'S PURPOSE FOR YOUR LIFE

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What's a hammer for? It's been designed to drive nails. That's what it was created to do. Imagine a hammer that never gets used, lying idle in a toolbox.

What if that hammer had a soul, a self-consciousness? After many days of disuse, the hammer might feel dissatisfied, as though something was missing.

After some time had passed, someone pulled the hammer from the toolbox to break some sticks for a fire. The hammer was exhilarated. In the days that followed, he was used again and again, to reshape a hubcap, to punch through a sheet rock wall, and to straighten a table leg. Still, he was unfulfilled. He longed for more action. More of the same, he thought, would fill the empty space he felt inside.

Finally, someone used him to drive a nail. Suddenly, the lights came on in his hammer soul, as he realized what he had been truly designed for. He was meant to drive nails. At last, he had found what his hammer soul had been searching for all along.

Why does fulfillment seem so elusive? Are we searching in the wrong places? Or, are we overlooking something that's right in front of us? How can we find God's purpose for our lives? And what are we to do when we have found it?

Jesus once told a story of three servants entrusted with their Master's wealth.

Matthew 25 (NLT)

<sup>14</sup> *"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. <sup>15</sup> He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip.*

<sup>16</sup> *"The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. <sup>17</sup> The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. <sup>18</sup> But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master's money.*

<sup>19</sup> *"After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. <sup>20</sup> The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver came forward with five more and said, 'Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest, and I have earned five more.'*

<sup>21</sup> *"The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'*

<sup>22</sup> *"The servant who had received the two bags of silver came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two bags of silver to invest, and I have earned two more.'*

<sup>23</sup> *"The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'*

<sup>24</sup> *"Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, 'Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. <sup>25</sup> I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.'*

<sup>26</sup> “But the master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn’t plant and gathered crops I didn’t cultivate,’<sup>27</sup> why didn’t you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.’

<sup>28</sup> “Then he ordered, ‘Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver.’<sup>29</sup> To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away.<sup>30</sup> Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

## **Heavenly Journey; Earthly Responsibility**

Our Master, Jesus, has also gone away on a long journey. It has been almost 2,000 years so far. In His absence, He has entrusted us— His church, *you and I*—with His wealth—His truth, His Spirit, His name, His influence. When He returns, do you think He will expect an accounting? Will He ask us what we have done with what He entrusted to us?

If you are not fulfilling God’s purpose for your life...what are you doing for heaven’s sake?

Think seriously: What does Jesus expect to see when He returns? What really matters to Him? What really counts?

How will He respond if we offer Him something else? If we offer explanations and excuses?

So, what is God’s purpose for your life? Not the textbook answer, but the down-to-earth reason you are here? Why you, and not someone else? You *are* special, but how? And why?

## **Mr. Sandman**

Some people confuse dreams with purpose. Some elevate dreams above achievements, as if just *wanting to go somewhere, or liking the idea* of being there was more important than actually *getting there!*

Dreams can inform. Dreams can inspire. Dreams can motivate. But your dreams are not your purpose; they are only your *awakening* to something higher. They are suggestive; they are not concrete. And God’s purpose for your life is solid concrete! It is practical. It is functional. It is fruitful.

## **Hidden Treasure**

God’s purpose must be discovered—in the course of ordinary daily life.

You cannot discover it by taking a test or assessment. Those can only help you recognize the components of God’s purpose. For instance, a personality assessment can help you recognize your God-given personality traits. A spiritual gifts assessment can help you recognize your God-given talents. But you are more than the sum of such parts! The way these components have been blended and balanced in your individual life is completely unique. That’s why you can’t find the answers to this elemental question in a book. You yourself are the book! And God is the Author.

Jesus told two brief stories to emphasize the extraordinary value of the Kingdom of Heaven—or, in our parlance today—God’s purpose for your life.

Matthew 13 (NLT)

<sup>44</sup> *"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field.*

<sup>45</sup> *"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. <sup>46</sup> When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!*

Like a *treasure!* Like a *precious pearl!* God's purpose for your life is more valuable than a treasure of gold, than many pearls. Its value is incomparable. It has no equal.

The point of these two stories is not found in their differences, but in their similarities. What they share in common is the response of the two men to their discoveries. Each one—because of the value of what he found—sold all that he had to obtain it.

What they found—the treasure, the pearl—could only be described in superlatives. They each found something of greater value than anything—no—than *everything* they had found to that time. It gave them a reason to live. A reason to live life with all their might!

### **Treasure to Own**

The "treasure" of your life is the unique gift-mix of your life—the gifts (both natural and supernatural) that God has given you so that you can fulfill His purpose. Discovering your unique gift-mix is important, but it is not the most important thing. Once you find your gift-mix, you must then do something to own it. You must sell everything else you have (that means everything else must become secondary to *owning God's purpose* for your life). You dare not ignore it or treat it casually. You must develop it.

If you want to own God's purpose for your life—if you want to do His will more than anything else—here are six things you must do:

- Consider Your Experience
- Recognize Your Passion
- Follow the Love
- Proceed With Courage
- Seek Confirmation
- Commit to the Journey

Think with me about the value of each.

### **Consider Your Experience**

Have you ever considered that all the things that have happened to you in your life have a *good purpose*? That's what Paul meant when he wrote: *"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose"* (Romans 8:28).

In *all* things. Good things. Bad things. Easy things. Hard things. Pleasant things. Hurtful things. Things I wanted. Things I wanted to avoid. Things done to me. Things done by me. Unjust things. Righteous things. In all things, God was working.

He wasn't absent. He didn't forget you. He wasn't preoccupied. He didn't abandon you. He was working. He was working *for you*. He was working for your *good*.

Do you realize who we are talking about just now? The God who created the universe. There was nothing—not even light—then He spoke. He made everything that we know of, and all we have not yet known. He made everything we understand, and all that we still cannot fathom.

When the earth was chaotic and empty—what Eugene Peterson describes as a “soup of nothingness” (Genesis 1:2)—God spoke and created. He created the heavens. He created the earth. He created the seas. He created the mountains. He created the trees and plants. He created the beasts and fish and birds. He created humans. And it was “very good.” (Genesis 1:31)

He was working for good. Because He loves us. He made it all good, because He loves us. He made it all for us.

Now, do not imagine that anything has ever happened to you that He cannot turn to good. Some experiences brought you shame; He cleanses your shame. Some experiences brought you pain; He heals your pain. Some experiences brought others pain; He forgives your wrongs. And He is working it all together for good—your good, and our good. Praise to the Almighty God of grace!

Those trials have contributed more to who you are today—and how God can use you—than all your successes and celebrations put together. God comforts us in all of our troubles, so that we, in turn, can comfort others in a similar way (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Joseph had more than his share of setbacks (Genesis 37-50), but he ended up on top.

Moses had a difficult coming of age, and his assignment to set Israel free was no picnic (Exodus 2-3), but he served God in his generation and rescued a nation for the Lord.

### **Recognize Your Passion**

Now, Samson was a man of passion (Judges 13-16). To this day, he is known for his strength and energy and persistence. Sometimes it got him in deep trouble, but God made him the leader of Israel for 20 years.

The passion you must recognize and cultivate is not a passion for earthly things, but for heavenly. Of all the things that Jesus did when He was here on earth, what moves you the most? Was it his compassion for cripples or lepers? Was it His mercy towards wanton sinners? Was it His pity for the demonized? Or it His concern for the grieving? Was it His anger over self-righteous injustice?

What stirs you in our world today? The plight of the homeless? Those who suffer from broken homes? Those who must endure the ravages of disease? Those who are imprisoned in poverty? The illiterate? The addicted? The young? The old? The wounded? The ignored?

Who are you thinking of when you say, “I wish I could *do* something!”?

If you refuse to spend that passion on yourself, or bury it in self-serving distractions, you can forge it into a furnace of compassionate energy. Identify your primary passion and ask God how you can pour it out for others.

## **Follow the Love**

*“What matters,”* wrote Paul, *“is a faith that expresses itself through love”* (Galatians 5:6). Love is the channel of faith’s actions. If your action is not demonstrating love, it is not faith (no matter what you call it). God’s anointing flows along the path of loving deeds. If it’s not loving, it’s not anointed (no matter what anyone says about it). Loving God and loving people is what the Kingdom of God is about.

Do you want to know what the Father is doing? Follow the love. Where lovingkindness takes you, there you will find God is working. Do you want to see the power of God in your life? Follow the love. For *“love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God”* (1 John 4:7).

Mark (chapter 14) describes an occasion when Jesus had been invited to dinner. While He was there, a woman came in with a very expensive jar of perfume and poured it over Jesus’ head. His disciples became indignant, self-righteously decrying her deed as “a waste.” She poured out her very best for Jesus; no expense was too great. Jesus concluded the matter by saying her deed would never be forgotten. The lesson is not “follow the money,” but follow the love!

## **Proceed With Courage**

When you put together the background experiences that make you who you are, with the compassionate energy that God has put in your heart, and begin to recognize the beckoning call to love in the lives right around you, then you must move forward with the courage of faith.

Let nothing deter you. Let nothing distract you. This is the most precious treasure of your life we are talking about today! Proceed with courage.

You’ve heard it before, but it bears repeating: Courage is not the absence of fear, but the decision to act in spite of fear, because that action is too important to neglect.

Acts 13 and 14 describe the harrowing experience of Paul in Antioch, then Iconium, then Lystra. Some people in Antioch became upset about his message and drove him out of the city. Then they followed him to the next city and stirred up others to chase him out of that city, too. Unsatisfied, the two groups then followed him to a third city, where they stirred up more animosity and beat him severely and left him for dead. However, seemingly unstoppable, Paul got up and went immediately to the next town to preach again. Who behaves like this, throwing himself into harm’s way? A man of integrity, passion, and courage—that’s who.

## **Seek Confirmation**

Walking in faith means walking in uncertainty. Faith is not certainty (like knowledge); it is trusting obedience. If there is not a measure of uncertainty, faith is unnecessary. Faith overcomes uncertainty by obeying, instead of holding back or caving in.

And as you go forward in faith, look expectantly for confirmation of your decision. Look for God to affirm your choice and give His “amen” to your obedient faith.

If you don’t find His “amen” pretty soon, you should stop and ask Him for clarification. Don’t just presume that you heard His voice—you can make mistakes, you know. If you’re indeed following God, it won’t be long before you see some evidence of His presence and activity.

Peter was waiting for lunch one afternoon, when he had a vision. God gave Him an illustration of something new He was doing, something that would require Peter to move beyond his tradition and beyond his comfort zone in faithful obedience. God told Peter he would be invited to another home for lunch that day and that he should go without hesitation. Just then, the doorbell rang, and the servants of a Roman soldier—a devout man—arrived to escort Peter to their home. That was the first confirming sign. When he arrived at the home of Cornelius, he found the entire household gathered together to hear Peter’s message. While he spoke to them about the redeeming grace of God through Jesus Christ, the Lord sovereignly baptized them all in the Holy Spirit. That was the second confirmation. (Acts 10)

Confirmations turn uncertainty into assurance.

### **Commit to the Journey**

As assurance grows stronger, commitment should grow correspondingly deeper. You know this is not a journey for the faint of heart. Neither is it for the wavering soul. Only one thing can stabilize your emotions on this path: your commitment to walk it with God. Your commitment is your faith’s anchor. The deeper your commitment, the deeper your anchor, and the firmer your grip on God’s purpose for your life.

The path God chooses for you may be smooth or rough; it may be level or steep; it may be short or long. But He has promised never to leave you, never to abandon you, always to be with you, always to work for your good. Keep renewing your vow to trust Him. Keep renewing your vow to obey Him. Keep renewing your vow to praise Him. Thank Him for leading the way.

John was the son of a fisherman, destined (by the look of things) to be a fisherman all of his life. But when Jesus called, he left his nets to follow Him. John became a disciple, then an apostle, then a pastor, then a prisoner, and then a prophet. Through it all, he trusted Jesus supremely. If he wavered, he never quit. He was committed, because he was in the grip of God’s love.

### **Order is Important**

Notice the arrangement of these six components. It is crucial. It will be of no use to commit to the journey before you have considered your experience; you’ll have no idea of what you’re committing yourself to. And this is the very reason so many Christian commitments are hollow and bear no fruit. You might as well commit yourself to take a journey to you-know-not-where, and to travel you-know-not-how, for you-know-not-how-long. Such commitment, though well-meaning, will be fruitless.

Similarly, you cannot follow the love, without first considering your experience, because it is your accumulated experience that generates your unique breed of compassion. Such love would be unfounded and unsubstantial, and like a morning mist would evaporate before noon.

So take these in order. Work through them one by one. They may overlap somewhat, and you may review them at some later date, but don’t leave one until it is clear and firm in your thinking.

1. Consider Your Experience
2. Recognize Your Passion
3. Follow the Love
4. Proceed With Courage
5. Seek Confirmation
6. Commit to the Journey

By this path you will own that precious treasure—your life will gain lasting significance, your efforts will be multiplied, your heart will be filled to overflowing, and the smile of the Lord will be upon you. Are you ready to proceed?