

The Mapmaker's Guide

Map 6 - The Purposes of God

Spiritual Exercise

¹⁶ Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. ¹⁷ If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. John 7:16-17

The one who is willing to obey His Master's command before he hears it is the one who will understand what the Master is saying. In contrast, the one who comes to only hear, and not obey, deceives himself - even forgetting what kind of man he was (i.e., the Master's faithful servant).

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. James 1:22-24

As we position ourselves before the Master, let's commit ourselves to obedience; bringing our "amen" first; to be doers of His word.

Prayer

Amen, Father, amen. We bring a heart that desires to obey. We surrender our will to Yours. Give us ears to hear and hearts to respond. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Introduction

Finding purpose in life is one of man's greatest pursuits. It is a part of our DNA. Regrettably, we seek to find purpose in many of the wrong places. Don't misunderstand; it's not necessarily because all these places are wrong. Many are quite noble - work, family, church, service to others. God wants to give us purpose in all these areas.

The challenge is discerning from where, or whom, our purposes in life originate; for that thing or person will then govern the motivations and measures for our success. If our purposes center on our work, then we will become performance driven and prideful. If they begin with our relationships, we will become controlling and self-indulgent. Even service toward others - if it is the source of our purpose - will result in people-pleasing codependence.

For our purposes to be right and virtuous, they must originate in the One that has ordained and orchestrated them. They must be understood and pursued in the context of His greater purposes. This section of our adventure toward joyful, Spirit-filled ministry is focused on this critical first step - Surrendering to His Purposes.

This is a worthy saying: Your purpose is not to be found in a place or activity, but in a Person. Only God is the source of the purposes that are good, praiseworthy and worthwhile. Therefore, it is critical that we discover God's purposes for each season of our lives.

Definition

Purpose (*prosthesis*): a setting forth of a thing, placing of it in view, the showbread ("bread of faces", in the tabernacle, showing the offer and necessity of fellowship with God).

Outline of Biblical Usage, BlueLetterBible.org

Searching Out the Matter

(All Scripture references, but those noted, are NKJV; Thomas Nelson, Inc.; footnotes excluded)

Adjusting Our Focus

Most of our teaching about the “original sin” centers on what Mankind lost in Adam and Eve’s rebellion. We ruminate and regret our own reduced state.

“Woe is me! I have to toil for my living.”

“Woe is me! I have to labor in childbirth.”

But, what about God? Have you ever considered what God lost in the Garden of Eden? Shouldn’t we be concerned about His loss? As with anyone else we love, shouldn’t we be interested in Him getting it back? After all, He is the Master of the kingdom we call home - the place of our stewardship to the King. It just might be that Him getting back what belongs to Him is the best thing that could happen to us.

Our understanding of God’s loss is vital to our pursuit of His purposes for our lives; for a few very good reasons:

1. His ultimate purpose is to restore what He lost in our rebellion.
2. His purposes for us are secondary to His purposes for Himself and His kingdom.
3. It is within the context of His greatest purposes that we discover and understand the general and specific purposes for each season of our lives.

Most importantly, we are living in His story; and focusing on His story from His perspective will keep us humble and give Him pleasure.

Restoring that which was Lost

The Bible may be the only book written that is not spoiled by reading the end of the story first. In fact, it is encouraging and edifying to know what God is after; because we know that He will get whatever it is.

In the conclusion of His story, in the book of the Revelation, we discover what He has been up to since that fateful day in the Garden of Eden: Nothing less than the complete restoration of what He lost in Mankind’s rebellion.

¹ Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”
Revelation 21:1-4

Oh, what a glorious day! It is the day we long for, when “all things are made new”. It is the grand finale of God’s great story (at least the part He has revealed). In John’s description of this great day, we find a tight synopsis of His restorative purpose. And it’s not verse four - as wonderful and well quoted as it has become.

The greatest purposes of God are found in verse three - the order reminding us that it is for Him before it is for us:

1. “He will dwell with them” - It was always God’s intention to inhabit His people. Jesus spoke of its beginning, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him,

and We will come to him and make Our home with him.” (John 14:23) This is the spiritual reality of that which will be physically manifested in the New Jerusalem.

God will restore the habitation He intended to have with His people.

2. “They shall be His people” - We can only imagine the depths of intimacy God had with Adam and Eve in the Garden - and His loss in their rebellion. God sent Jesus to make a way for the restoration of His relationship with us. Jesus prayed the will of the Father back to Him in John 17:

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (v. 3)

... that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us (v. 21).

God will fully restore the intimate relationship He intended to have with His children.

3. “God Himself will be... their God” - The third thing God lost in the Garden was His reign in the hearts of His people. Before they disobeyed God’s command regarding the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve determined that they were better suited to make decisions for themselves. They determined to be their own kings. They rebelled against God in a futile attempt to become like Him.

God will fully restore His reign in the hearts of His subjects.

In the coming weeks we will look deeper into each of these great and mighty purposes, and explore their impact on the general and specific purposes that God has given us for this season of our lives. For now, please consider a few more encouragements regarding the role of purpose in the discovery of joyful, Spirit-filled ministry.

Ultimate, General and Seasonal Purposes

In addition to the three ultimate purposes found in God’s restoration story, there are what we might call general purposes. These include the purposes that every Christian has been given (e.g., to be salt and light); and the purposes that are given to large groups of Christians. For example, all pastors are called to shepherd the flock that has been given to them. Some general purposes may span seasons, but not continue for a person’s entire lifetime (e.g., pastor, mother).

There is a desire in each of our hearts to pursue the ultimate and general purposes of God. Each of us has a desire for God to get back what He lost in Mankind’s rebellion. We each have a desire to obey everyone of God’s and Christ’s commandments. It is good to think of these as “foundational desires” in the sense that they are central to our walk with the Lord. We must dedicate ourselves to a lifetime of discovering these desires in our own hearts, and surrendering to them.

Seasonal desires are different. These are desires that God has put in a particular person, or persons, for a particular season. God often gives the same desire to a group of individuals in order to draw them together for a community purpose. However, the seasonal desire for the group is still more specific than those that I am calling ultimate and general.

Why is this important? When you ask your heart (or someone else’s), “What is your desire?”, the initial response will often be a general desire. For example, “I want to love God and people more.” Or, “I want to glorify God in all I do.” These are good answers, but they are not specific to the person or the season. They, along with many other general desires, are for everyone at all times.

What we are looking for is something like, “I want to build a company that glorifies God in the telecommunications industry.” Specific desires may also identify themselves as a burden. For

example, to get prayer back in school or save children from slave trafficking. These are the desires that God turns into assignments.

Two closing points here: First, not everyone I have asked has been able to articulate a seasonal desire. I have not decided for myself if this is because they haven't been given one, or they are not ready to find it. This leads me to my second point.

It is critical that we pursue our seasonal desires on the foundation of God's three ultimate purposes, as well as the general desires He has given us for obedience to His word. God's orchestration and timing are perfect. We should not become discouraged - or judge another - when a seasonal desire is not obvious. As disciple makers, we must patiently and lovingly encourage others to explore and surrender to all the desires that God has placed in their hearts.

Letting Go of Our Purposes

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. Job 42:2

These two promises can be a powerful encouragement for those that are surrendered to God's purposes. All things work together for their good, and the purposes they are walking in will be fulfilled.

However, for these promises to be ours, our purposes must be His. Discovering God's purpose for a particular season of our lives begins by wiping the slate clean, even putting aside the things we "know" God is calling us to do. This is an intentional "letting go". It is an offering to God. It is surrender to God's purposes.

The immediate result of our surrender is the liberty to hear God without presumption; knowing that what we hear is God speaking. Additionally, there are three long term benefits:

1. The continued affirmation of the call. We are never found guessing about the Lord's purpose for our lives.
2. The enhanced ability to see all God is doing to manifest His purpose. God wants us to be full participants in the work He is accomplishing in and around us.
3. God rewards our surrender with a deeper understanding of His heart - something beyond "blind faith".

Together, these benefits are a part of the "spirit of wisdom and revelation" found in Paul's first prayer for the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:15-21).

This understanding includes the positioning of our purpose in His bigger picture. When the going gets tough, we can rest in the fact that God is in control, and we can put our faith in His promises - like those found in Psalm 37.

⁵ Commit your way to the Lord,
Trust also in Him,
And He shall bring it to pass.

⁶ He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light,
And your justice as the noonday.

Psalm 37:5-6

²³ The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord,
And He delights in his way.

²⁴ Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down;
For the Lord upholds him with His hand.

Psalm 37:23-24

Purpose or Plan?

The purposes of God and the plans of God are not the same thing, but they can be easily confused. In the simplest terms, purpose is what God would have you do, and plan is how He will accomplish His purpose with and through you. It is important to keep the purpose and the plan separate, but synchronized - continually testing the plan against the purpose. The purpose is a spiritually safer place because it requires surrender - an intentionally weak position; whereas the plan requires effort and decision - two things we can subconsciously subvert from God.

We will talk more about the plan in the future. For now it's good to know that God usually reveals enough of the plan for us to discover the sacrifice and trust that will be required. Jesus' command to "count the cost" becomes real to many for the first time, when God begins to reveal His plan.

Be Careful in Your Approach

Man's ways of discovering God's will for our lives have infected the church. For example, a well-known Christian author wrote the following:

"God has created every person with a purpose. But not everyone discovers what that purpose is. To find out, get to know yourself - your strengths and weaknesses. Look at your opportunities. Examine where God has put you. Then seek His counsel. He will give you a vision for your life."

The author seems to suggest that finding God's purpose begins with seeking to know yourself. A much more profitable approach would be seeking to know God's counsel first. We can do this by humbly recognizing the limits of our knowledge and understanding; and pursuing His wisdom in the "delight" that is soft as clay in the Potter's hands (Psalm 37:4). Again, this is an exercise in surrender - putting us in a place to both hear His voice and find Him in the adventure.

Conclusion

The purposes of God will not be denied Him (Job 42:2). All things work together for good to those that are called to His purpose (Romans 8:28). If we are working for His purposes, it will be all good for us. If we are not, then we are probably working against Him. We would do well to know the purposes of God - ultimate, general and specific. That will be the focus of the remainder of this section. For now, be forewarned that His purposes will run against those of our carnal nature.

Application

People look to Marketplace Leaders for vision and purpose. This is a characteristic of the "natural born leader" - a flattering and encouraging title. But there is more for God's people. Step into the purposes of God, and you will become a supernatural leader! Now that's something to get excited about!

Reckoning

God is restoring what was lost in the Garden.

Assignment

The most important thing about this exercise is spending time with God - asking Him questions that He is eager to answer. It is about fellowship with the One that has been orchestrating events and processes to bring you (and those around you) into this season. There are no coincidences for God's children; and He does not intend for His children to be blind to His purposes.

1. Review the Bible passages for this week. Share at least one of the concepts with someone you know.

2. Each day this week, ask the Lord to show you the purposes you have assumed. Set these aside.
3. Intentionally surrender to the general purposes He has for all Christians. I suggest you do this verbally (e.g., "Father God, I surrender to living for Your glory."). Others include:
 1. Loving Him with all your heart, mind, soul and strength;
 2. Agreeing with Jesus for Unity;
 3. Disciple-making; and,
 4. Anything else He brings to your attention.
4. Ask God to show you the desire/burden He wants to share with you. Ask Him to break your heart for what breaks His.

Devotion

From Os Hillman TGIF: Discovering Your Purpose

If you are going to discover how God wants to use your life and work, you must know why you were created. If you start trying to determine your purpose in life before understanding why you were created, you will inevitably get hung up on the things you do as the basis for fulfillment in your life, which will only lead to frustration and disappointment.

First and foremost, God created you to know Him and to have an intimate relationship with Him. In fact, God says that if a man is going to boast about anything in life, "boast about this: that he understands and knows me" (Jer. 9:24). Mankind's relationship with God was lost in the Garden when Adam and Eve sinned. Jesus' death on the cross, however, allows us to restore this relationship with God and to have an intimate fellowship with Him. The apostle Paul came to understand this when he said, "I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself" (Phil. 3:10, THE MESSAGE).

Establishing this relationship with God is vital to understanding your purpose. If you don't have this relationship with God, you will seek to fulfill your purpose out of wrong motives; such as fear, insecurity, pride, money, relationships, guilt, or unresolved anger. God's desire is for you to be motivated out of love for Him and to desire to worship Him in all that you do. As you develop your relationship with God, He will begin to reveal His purpose for your life. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord" (Jer. 29:11).

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