

LIVING TO PURPOSE — PART 3 POINTERS TO PERSONAL PURPOSE

Take a word out of context and you can change or lose its meaning. Put it in to context and the meaning becomes clear.

Our lives are like that. Out of context we can become confused or errant. In context, our meaning and purpose become clear.

The context for your personal purpose in God is the purpose of the *Church*. And the context for the Church is *God's eternal purpose* — **to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one Head, even Christ** (Eph 1:10). We said last time that the purpose of the Church is to *be a people* under one Head, and to proclaim and act in such a way that more and more people—and more and more *of* people—will be brought together under one Head. In that context, we must seek and find our individual purpose.

It was a full evening of powerful ministry. The whole town gathered at the door, and many were healed and delivered. His popularity was high, and it must have been very tempting to remain, to enjoy the celebrity or repeat the experience. But the next morning, Jesus moved on. Why? Because He knew why He had come. Jesus lived to purpose. (Mk 1:32-39)

There's awesome power in personal purpose. Personal purpose *inspires* us. Personal purpose *motivates* us. Personal purpose enables us live a focused life: to sift out the *right* things from the *possible* things, the things we *should* do from the things we *could* do; to discern the things that matter from the things that dilute and deflect and distract; to separate the specific "to do" from the general "worth doing".

This article obviously cannot *tell* you your personal purpose! But, once we have the context right, it can give some *pointers* to finding it, again using Ephesians chapter 1.

Begin with worship (Eph 1:3)

Everything begins with worship. It is essential that we give God His place first. It's about *Him*. It's His show. We are bit-part players — He's the star. We may protest, "But I want to do something important!" The Westminster Confession reminds us that the chief end of man (i.e. the most important thing) is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. We need to bring to God a worshipful heart, and also actual worship.

In Acts, Paul makes three great apostolic or missionary journeys. Paul was fruitful. He fulfilled his personal purpose. Where did it begin? "*While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul [Paul] for the work to which I have called them.'*" (Acts 13:2). It began in worship.

Start with knowing you're thoroughly blessed (Eph 1:3)

Do you know you're blessed? Or do you feel sold short? If you're not convinced of blessing and living in gratitude, you'll either serve grudgingly as a poor relation, or you'll serve *in order to gain* blessing. This motivation is works and not grace. In Luke 15, the Prodigal Son was in the wrong in squandering his inheritance. But his elder brother was in the wrong too. Everything his father had was his, yet for years he'd been slaving in the fields, craving his father's favour, yet unaware of it — not knowing that he was blessed.

Christians can be ungrateful! (Strange, but true.) Sometimes we grumble and complain and forget where we've come *from*, and how good even the *bad* times are now compared to what we used to know. We easily lose our sense of perspective. Often it takes a reversal or near catastrophe to shake us back to right perceptions.

Recognise the blessings you have in Christ Jesus. Anything else is a bonus!

Submit to the sovereignty of God (Eph 1:4)

Our personal purpose is God's choice and God's appointing. We don't get to sit in God's restaurant, look at the "purposes" menu and make our selection. Paul knows that he is "*an apostle of Christ Jesus*" and that it's "*by the will of God*" (Eph 1:1). Our assignment is a discovery process. Arguments are pointless.

The task God gives us to do at first may not be His ultimate for us. But unless we do it, we may not see His ultimate. Our tendency is to imitate others, either assuming their call is our call, or wishing it was. But there really is no point in trying to be someone else. The only person you can ever successfully be is *you*. We can imitate others' good character and be challenged by their responsiveness to God, but it's pointless being jealous of their assignment. God won't change His mind. The reason is not His intransigence, but that in order to change His mind He'd have to re-make *us*. God's will for us is actually what's best for us as He designed us to be — whether at the time we realise it or not.

In the light of God's choice, we "submit", that is, we take our place.

Establish your stance: By His grace to His glory (Eph 1:5-14)

Reading these verses again with this phrase in mind, we can see it — by His grace, to His glory. The alternative is that we think we're someone special with something special to offer. We *are* — but only because He's made us to be. It's grace.

And it's not to *our* glory, but *His*. We're not seeking our personal purpose in order to shine in that purpose for our own sake. It's not to impress or to be seen by men, but to serve well to the glory of God.

When we take the stance "by His grace, to His glory", we position ourselves as safe for God to release us into His purpose for us. In any other stance, we're likely to cause damage, however unintentionally, to ourselves or to others.

Quest continually after wisdom and revelation (Eph 1:17,18)

"...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." (NASU). The Message translation renders these verses in this way:

I ask—ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally, your eyes focused and clear, so that you can see exactly what it is he's calling you to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life he has for Christians ...

There is wisdom and there is revelation, and God speaks in both these ways, focused on Jesus. God tends to reveal His plans one step at a time. One way to understand this is to consider that He can give overall personal vision (revelation), but that the outworking of it depends on daily small steps (wisdom).

We always seek more, always need enlightenment — "*We know in part.*"

To recapitulate: begin with worship; start with knowing you're thoroughly blessed; submit to the sovereignty of God; establish your stance: by His grace, to His glory; quest continually after wisdom and revelation. After these, there is one last thing to add:

Make a commitment to be a functioning part of the Body, and solidly under the Head (Eph 1:19-23)

It's only in doing the general that the specific emerges. Serving in general is the mechanism that releases more clarity to serve in particular, that is, to find our specialism. Otherwise we make the revelation of a particular purpose an excuse for not serving. Therefore make yourself available. Volunteer. Look for things that need to be done and *do* them.

But don't be driven in hyperactivity. Be solidly under the Head, co-operating with the rest of the Body rather than creating tension in it. Obeying the Lord, pulling together, building together.

As you do so, your personal purpose will be there to fulfil. And together we'll *live* in the purpose of God — "*to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one Head, even Christ.*"

George Alexander
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Note: All Bible quotations are NIV unless otherwise stated.