

Made to Serve 8-31-03

Purpose Driven Life, chapters 29-35

Man comes at life with a "what can I get out of it" attitude. You've probably heard expressions like, "Live life to the full", and "Go for the gusto!" Jesus had such a radically selfless approach that it could have only come from God. He said that if you save your life you will lose it, but if you lose your life for His sake and the Gospel, you will find it (Matthew 16:24-25). He came as the Creator over His creation, but He demonstrated the right way to live by serving. His entire life was a life of service to God. In fact, as He approached the last day of His life, He declared that it was absolutely essential that they understand that He came only to do the will of the Father (John 14:31). Who among us lives only for another? We may sacrifice here or there to please our spouse or a good friend, but live your whole life for another...? Yet that was what Jesus declared that He had done. He lived for the purpose that the Father had sent Him. He was totally focused on completing the assignment that God had given Him. His was a life of service to the Father and thus to mankind.

You have an assignment too. As a part of the body of Christ, you were designed to make a contribution. That is your fourth purpose for being. It may come as a shock, but you are not here just to consume resources, enjoy living, raise children, retire wealthy and play golf. I'm not a golfer, but I could just as well have said dive. I love to dive, but diving is not why I'm here. I'm here to serve, just like my Master. Now, if you have a worldly mindset that causes you to cringe, because to you, those things are life. That is because you don't have mindset that matches with the reality about serving. It's like speaking of being more blessed to give than receive. It sounds like craziness until you try it and find out it is true.

The Bible teaches that, **"God has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do."** Ephesians 2:10b (TEV) Those good deeds are serving God, and serving God almost always comes in the form of serving our fellow man. Think of it. Before you were born, God had specific good things planned for you to do. Listen to how He said this to Jeremiah. *"Before I made you in your mother's womb, I chose you. Before you were born, I set you apart for a special work."* Jeremiah 1:5 (NCV) He designed you uniquely with certain acts of service in mind.

When God put the blueprint of your physical being together, He only had 10 to the 2,400,000,000th power possible combinations. If you think that may have limited God, consider that there are estimated to be only 10 to the 76th power particles in the universe! On top of that He had an infinite variety of experiences that would help to shape your personality. He formed you uniquely for His service. Yet, you have a choice as to whether or not you will accept His assignments. God isn't going to make you walk into those privileged

Commented [notes1]: ²⁴Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. Matthew 16:24-25 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ³¹but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. "Come now; let us leave. John 14:31 (NIV)

assignments. He just invites. Just remember, you say, "no thank you" at your loss.

It's not only that these acts of service give your life great significance and value, but also it is our reasonable response to God's request. Why? Because, *God paid a great price for you. So use your body to honor God.*" 1 Corinthians 6:20 (CEV) It is easy to forget, in our daily busyness, that we have been purchased from the enemy of our soul. Gratitude for His life of service to God for us should cause us to be willing to serve. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"Because of God's great mercy...Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service."* Romans 12:1 (TEV) A life that is redeemed is one that wants to serve. We've been made whole to serve like Peter's mother-in-law. The moment she was healed by Jesus, the Bible says, she stood up and began to serve Jesus. (Matthew 8:15) We are healed to help, blessed to be a blessing, saved to serve, not just sit around and please ourselves.

Commented [notes3]: ¹⁵Jesus touched her hand, and the fever left her. Then she stood up and began to serve Jesus.
Matthew 8:15 (NCV)

Some people get the idea that only pastors or missionaries are called to serve God. Peter tells us that, *"You were chosen to tell about the excellent qualities of God, who called you."* 1 Peter 2:9 (GWT) Regardless of our occupation, we are all called to fulltime Christian service. When we serve our fellow man through our occupation, they should see Jesus in us. A Christian doctor shows the compassion of Christ. A Christian carpenter shows the care and service of Christ in his craft and dealings with his customer. The Christian clerk treats others with the respect and honesty that is of Jesus. Their employer should see Jesus' faithfulness and honesty in their work. A Christian retiree uses their time to be a blessing. A "non-serving Christian" is an oxymoron. A Christian is identified by love for God and his fellow man, and that expresses itself in service.

Israel, the nation, was moved to the crossroads of the world so that the people of the world could learn about the true God. As they passed through Israel on the way to trade with other nations, they could stop at the outer courtyard of the House of God. That was supposed to be a place of prayer for all nations. They were supposed to see a God that is superior to all other things worshipped as God. That impression of the true God was supposed to invade their heart and mind and return with them to their homeland. That was God's intention and Israel's unique opportunity. God has the same idea in mind for our lives. As Christians filled with the Spirit of God, His modern day house, we interact with the world in service and love. The world sees in us a God that so superior to wealth and fame and any other thing worshipped as God that they will hunger for the same relationship.

Here was the problem in Jesus' day: When foreigners came to Israel and to the Temple they could only hear people trying to make a buck. Everyone was hawking his or her currency exchange rates or their best price for a sacrificial lamb. Others were using the courtyard as a shortcut from one side of the city to the other. You couldn't pray if you wanted to, let alone see the greatness of the

God of Israel. See that foreign traveler standing in that noisy courtyard wondering about the God of Israel. What a shame! What a lost opportunity!

Just like Israel, *"You were chosen to tell about the excellent qualities of God, who called you."* Remember our four purposes for being? He called you to be His, to glorify Him in worship, to be a member of His body, to become more like Jesus, and that expresses itself in service to God. Paul wrote, *"Now you belong to him...in order that we might be useful in service to God."* Romans 7:4 (TEV)

When your life comes in contact with others, is it so full of money making and rushing from here to there that they don't see God at all? Imagine if that outer courtyard of the Temple was instead full of students of God's word, prayerfully ready to serve the foreign visitor by telling them about the incredible God of Israel. If they followed the laws of God, their hospitality and service would have exceeded that of any culture. In the same way, if we follow Jesus' incredible example of a life of service, the world's interaction with us will cause them to hunger for God. That is what some call "life-style evangelism". Is your outer life a house of prayer that draws people to Jesus or a busy market place?

In China, they welcome new believers into fellowship by saying, "Jesus now has a new pair of eyes to see with, new ears to listen with, new hands to help with, and a new heart to love others with." They understand that the life of Christ will express itself in us by serving others. This happens throughout our workday. But we also have a unique service to the body of believers. *"All of you together are Christ's body, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it."* 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NLT)

Churches are dying by the thousands because of an attitude shift. This attitude shift is a picture of spiritual immaturity and selfishness. It says, "What can I get out of going here," instead of, "What can I give by being here?" As our culture shifts from servants to spectators, that world attitude seeps in and sows apathetic selfishness in our churches. I'm glad to say that here at Wayside I sense a shift in the other direction! People in construction ask me what they can do to help with the new construction, or help on a committee to pick colors and textures. When someone is sick, meals are provided and people pray for their recovery. When a widow's home needs a repair, someone is ready to help. When a class needs to be taught or a sermon preached, ready and willing brothers and sisters in Christ offer to serve. When housing is needed for a guest, hospitality is offered. Someone volunteered to write cards to those who we missed on Sunday. And some check on the elderly that did not attend to be sure they are well. That is a sign that we are becoming a healthy church. Praise God!

I think God is most pleased with the little acts that no one else sees or acknowledges. Who puts the fresh glass of water up here each week for the speaker? Who makes sure there are sharp pencils and envelopes in the pews? God knows a secret about some of His hidden servants. They prefer to remain

anonymous because they want their reward in heaven. We want to encourage people by saying "thank-you" for a job well done, but we certainly don't want to steal the blessing you get from secretly serving Jesus. Have you found a place and a way to serve the community and the body of believers because your love for Jesus and gratitude for all He's done for you?

The last purpose for our lives that we looked at, being conformed to Christ's likeness, is not an end in itself. We are transformed so that we can do what He did. Jesus said, *"Your attitude must be like my own, for I, the Messiah, did not come to be served, but to serve and to give my life."* Matthew 20:28 (LB) We mature in Christ so that we can be good examples of Jesus to others as we serve. As we serve them, they see Jesus in us.

Here is a huge problem in the wealthy, educated, comfortable church of America, *"Impression without expression leads to depression."* -Rick Warren The very last thing some of us need is another Bible study. Our greatest need is to get out and live what we have filled our minds with over the years. When we sit in study after study and become intellectual Bible scholars and yet don't act on what we have learned, we actually begin to get depressed. Well we should, for we are not living the truths we are learning. It doesn't matter what your age is, old or young, you can find a way to serve. There are those that serve through prayer, and some who serve by encouraging. The spiritually mature in Christ stop asking, "Who is going to meet my needs?" and begin to ask, "Whose needs can I meet?" Their attitude changes from "serve us" to "service".

How do you find your place of service? Serve! Experiment. Try different things, and if it doesn't work, call it an experiment, not a failure. You'll know when you come upon that thing that God has called you to. You'll sense God's blessing and empowerment. People will probably comment on how well you did it if it is a visible gift. You'll enjoy it. You'll recognize how your God given gifts and talents come together to equip you for it. Then do that calling with increasing skill and effectiveness. We can always learn and improve, developing our gift.

I have a friend in Colorado who was searching for some way to serve. He took his lovely young girls to a nursing home and sang. The elderly loved it. Now their whole family serves in that way on a regular basis. Another friend who is a doctor in Chicago prays with his patients when they are willing. Do you know that a recent poll showed the vast majority of medical patients said they would prefer that their doctors offered to pray for them? I know another person who likes to secretly give money to those who have fallen on financial hard times. These are examples of people who were looking for the way God had designed them to serve Him by serving others.

There are also places of service that don't match your design, but no one else is doing it. God can gift you with the ability until the person comes along that is meant to do the job. When you recognize a need, it is often God's invitation to

you to fill the need yourself. No task should be too lowly. Consider the fact that Jesus washed feet, blessed children, and even cooked breakfast. Jump in and serve and be blessed. Don't worry that you don't do it as well as someone else or in the same way as someone else. The Bible warns us not to compare ourselves with each other. Some churches teach that if something can't be done with excellence, don't do it. If that was the case, how did the people develop that ministry excellence? Let us always be encouraging and patient toward those who are learning a new way to serve. Look for potential not perfection.

Let us be sure that our acts of service are always for the glory of God. The Bible warns us that even acts of service can be a performance for self-glorification. *"When you do good deeds, don't try to show off. If you do, you won't get a reward from your Father in heaven."* Matthew 6:1 (CEV) Servanthood is for the love and glory of God, not self-promotion. It is for the audience of One.

Have you found the joy of serving God? Have you discovered that serving is more blessed than being served? Do you serve because Jesus served you? If not, what is your excuse? *"Abraham was old, Jacob was insecure, Leah was unattractive, Joseph was abused, Moses stuttered, Gideon was poor, Samson was codependent, Rahab was immoral, David had an affair and all kinds of family problems, Elijah was suicidal, Jeremiah was depressed, Jonah was reluctant, Naomi was a widow, John the Baptist was eccentric to say the least, Peter was impulsive and hot-tempered, Martha worried a lot, the Samaritan woman had several failed marriages, Zaccheaus was unpopular, Thomas had doubts, Paul had poor health, and Timothy was timid. That is quite a variety of misfits, but God used each of them in his service. He will use you, too, if you stop making excuses."* - Rick Warren

Is God tugging at your heart this morning to serve in some way? Write it out on one of the communication cards or call me and we'll see what we can do to help you experiment in serving in that capacity. Need some direction about where to serve in a soup kitchen or something physical around the church? Come see me for direction. Many of you are already serving. Tell me how I can help you improve your servant skills. Most of the ministries of our church came about by people recognizing God's call and just checking with the leadership to see if it was OK to start doing it. Let's keep growing in servanthood. If we grow in Christ's likeness we will grow in our capacities to serve. To give you a demonstration of how much I believe this, join us on the patio and your pastor is going to cook and serve you hot dogs to celebrate this Labor Day. I think we've just turned it into a Labor for the Lord Day. Amen?

Let me close with this verse from Colossians 3:17 (NIV) *Whatever you do whether in word or in deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*