

“What’s My Purpose in Life?”

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A dear younger friend of mine recently posted this question on a forum:

“Do you feel that you have a great mission or purpose in life?”

“I do feel like I’m made for something more than this, but whatever it is I can’t reach it, or find out what it is. I do feel as though I have a great purpose or mission in life—I’m sure I do!!! Why can I just not figure it out?”

“Was I born in the wrong time? My roommate says that I’m like a young person who thinks they were meant for more. She says hardly anyone here has a great life of purpose and I just have to accept reality. 99% of the people are just normal people—that there are not that many characters, priests, prophets, or heroes.

“Does everyone go through life never figuring out what their great purpose is? There has to be a purpose beyond just surviving. Roommate says that my problem is that I think I’m born to be a superstar, a saint or a hero. She thinks I’m just unrealistic, and what I expect from and of myself is unrealistic. I think she’s a pessimist. I want to do something big. I don’t want a mediocre life.”

Similar to C.S. Lewis’ argument that our longings correspond to God’s plan for the fulfillment of those longings (such as experiencing hunger because food exists for us to eat, and experiencing fatigue because there is such a thing as sleep), I think my friend’s longing for the something bigger and something more, her disdain for a mediocre life, is indeed shaped by God’s call to love and serve Him in large and glorious ways. But we may have been waylaid by the “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life” gospel, since many 20th-century Westerners seem to have directed their focus to finding out this wonderful plan rather than on God Himself.

I don't see anywhere in scripture where we are called to find our purpose in life. I think God just wants us to obey what He's already given us. When we do a search for the phrases "God's will" or "will of God" in the Bible, we know for sure God wants us to do things like give thanks in all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18), be sanctified and avoid sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3), silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good (1 Peter 2:15), and sometimes, suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong (1 Peter 3:17).

All the "one anothers" in the Bible are commands, so those are God's will as well. So our purpose in life is to please Him through obedience, which should grow out of our awareness that He loves us and made us for Himself.

Because we are made in the image of God, our purpose in life is to put Him on display. We—our bodies, our minds, our humor, our gifts and talents—are a display case for the glory of God. I think the specifics of how we go about that don't matter as much as we seem to think they do. Desiring to be truthful and transparent in serving as display cases for the treasure within matters more, I believe.

According to John 15, it is the Lord's pleasure—and thus His purpose for us—that we bear *much* (as opposed to *some* or *more*) fruit in us. That means Christlikeness; that means the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control (Galatians 5:22). So whether we are engaged in paid work or evangelizing on street corners, changing diapers or driving in traffic, putting Jesus on display is the most important thing. To do that, we need to continually immerse ourselves in His presence and His word, and hang around His people who are also immersing themselves in His presence and His word.

Right along with spiritual fruit is the topic of spiritual gifts. Finding God's personal purpose for us will involve discovering which of the spiritual gifts He has given each one of us, and using them to build up the body of Christ and bless

others. (They are found in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4.)

And finally, 2 Corinthians 2 offers a delightful word picture of Christ-followers serving as “a sweet aroma of Christ to God” the Father, as well as bringing the fragrance of knowing Christ to people who are either being saved or perishing. That, too, is part of our purpose in life. I think that if we focus on what God has already told us pleases Him, obeying the commands He has already given His children, we’ll get to the point of looking in the rear-view mirror of life and discovering, “Oh, *that* was my personal purpose! Cool!”

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