

The Bread of the Presence and Purpose

It has been my privilege to talk and write about the topic of life purpose for the last eleven years. I have traveled to many places and have seen many people come to an understanding of who they are and who they are not. I have seen countless people set free from the futile efforts to be something or someone they are not.

As I have researched the topic of purpose, I have found many books on the subject. But many of those writing have not used the Bible in their work and have even come from Zen Buddhism. The lack of biblical perspective has disturbed me and has caused others at times to question just how biblical the issue of purpose is.

On several occasions, I have begun to do a Bible study on the topic of purpose. When I do, I always run into the Greek word for purpose, which is "prothesis." It literally means "setting forth" and "exposed before," and almost always is used in connection with the showbread that was part of the tabernacle and Temple. This showbread is also referred to as the bread of the presence.

I have usually stopped my study at that point because I was hesitant to draw too many analogies between the subject of purpose and the bread of the presence. I did not want to connect the bread and the purpose in an inappropriate way or "twist" or "force" Scripture to fit my concept. I was afraid of going too far in my connection between the two.

But I don't feel I can wait any longer. Several weeks ago I was in Birmingham, England and felt an impression that now was the time to take a look at the showbread as it relates to the topic of purpose. Let's begin our study by looking at the showbread, what it was, where it was located and what it was there for.

In Leviticus 24:5-9, we see that

"Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf. Set them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the Lord. Along each row put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the Lord by fire. This bread is to be set out before the Lord regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant. It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of their regular share of the offerings made to the Lord by fire."

Without much explanation, let me draw some quick analogies between the showbread, the bread of the presence, and your life purpose.

1. **The bread was made of fine flour.** You make fine flour by beating and grinding wheat. The higher the quality of flour, the more beating the wheat has endured. That is how it is with your purpose. Often it is only released through a process of preparation and that preparation can be deep and even traumatic. The finest bread is made of the finest ingredients, which often take time and effort to prepare. There is no other way. The fine

flour of the Old Testament is always a type of Jesus, who endured tremendous tribulation to see His purpose released and fulfilled.

2. **Bake twelve loaves.** After the wheat is beaten into flour, it is then exposed to fire. This bread is unleavened bread, similar to modern crackers, which had no leaven. There was nothing in it to puff it up and make it look bigger than it was. There were twelve loaves. Why twelve? There were 12 tribes in Israel. There was enough bread of purpose for all the tribes. The message of purpose is for everyone, all God's tribes.
3. **Use two-tenths of an ephah to bake each loaf.** The essence of purpose is in all of us in equal measure. You may not have the same effect as someone else, but your purpose is just as significant and critical.
4. **Set them in two rows.** God orders purpose according to His sovereign will. He puts us in place according to His plan. Some believe there were actually stacks of the bread and not neat rows. That would be consistent with finding and fulfilling your purpose: it isn't always a neat and orderly process.
5. **Set them on the table of gold before the Lord.** The table of gold was a wood table that was covered in pure gold. Without a lot of explanation, this table was a type of Jesus. He was a man (wood) and God (gold). Your purpose rests on the foundation of Jesus, who was a man of purpose. We define ourselves in the context of Jesus who did the perfect will of God. More on that later.
6. **Put some incense along each row as a memorial.** When you function in your purpose, you are a pleasing aroma, a fragrant sacrifice to the Lord. When you try to be something you're not, you can only do that in the strength of your flesh. Flesh doesn't smell so good in God's nostrils, but His incense is pleasant. It is interesting that the wise men brought frankincense to the baby Jesus as a gift.
7. **The incense was an offering to the Lord by fire.** When you function in your purpose, there is a fire about you that burns but doesn't consume you. You are like a burning bush and what you do, you do for God. It rises before God as a fragrant sacrifice.
8. **The bread was set out Sabbath after Sabbath.** Isn't it interesting that the bread of the presence was changed every Sabbath. When you function in your purpose, there is rest for you. You stop striving in your own strength and operate in the divine energy that comes when you function in your purpose. Rest isn't always a cessation of activity, but activity that actually rejuvenates you as you engage in it. Jesus often functioned in His purpose without food or rest and was effective.
9. **The bread was for all the Israelites.** When you find your purpose, it encourages others to find theirs. My purpose is like a down payment to you. If I can find mine, you can find yours.
10. **The bread belonged to Aaron and his sons.** In this gospel age, we are all priests unto the Lord. There is no family of priests who inherit the priesthood through their family. The bread of the presence, the bread of purpose, is there to nourish you in your service to and for God. Purpose is not just for one generation, something special that only happens at certain points in history, but rather it is for every generation.
11. **The bread was replaced and eaten every Sabbath.** It isn't enough to talk about purpose. If you are to live by it, you must digest it. Your purpose must become part and parcel with who you are. In eating it, there is nourishment and rest, things the Sabbath was to provide for man.

12. **It was eaten in the holy place.** There is a specific “place” where you fulfill your purpose. It may be among a group of people, in a certain country, or in a certain set of circumstances. My purpose is to bring order out of chaos. I am in the holy place when I am in chaos bringing order. That is where I meet the Lord and where His presence is special for me. Wherever that is for you, it is a holy place. That is where you eat your purpose and where it nourishes you for more service.
13. **It was a most holy part of the regular offerings by fire for Aaron.** Your purpose is special, it is holy and set apart for God. There is nothing else like it for you. You eat it along with all that God has done in your life and it sustains you. To not function in your purpose is to cut yourself off from something that will feed you spiritually.
14. **It was located in the inner court, just prior to the entrance to the Holy of Holies, along with the lamp stand and the altar of incense.** Your purpose brings new light (Saul found his purpose in the bright light on the Damascus road). It sets you apart for God (see Acts 13:1). It renews your prayer life (symbolized by the incense altar) because when you pray about your purpose and how to achieve it, God listens!

This bread, referred to as showbread in the King James, is translated as the bread of the presence in the New International Version. I regularly ask people seeking their purpose to define what it is that they do and feel God’s presence doing it. What makes the hair on their neck stand up, so to speak? That “feeling” is often the presence of God. He is working in you and through you when you function in your purpose. Your purpose is your bread of the presence for you. You could do it all day, lose track of time and not eat, and you would be sustained.

Jesus had that dynamic in His life and often likened bread to doing the will of God. He also referred to Himself as the bread of life, the bread that came down from heaven. Let’s look at a few of these verses:

1. Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:35-40).

Here Jesus declared Himself to be the bread of life. When you come to Jesus, you touch a man of purpose who is ready to put you in touch with your purpose. That purpose will feed you and quench the thirst you have for meaning and relationship with God. What is this bread of life? Jesus said that He came down from heaven not to do His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him. That is the bread of life: to do the will of God, your purpose!

2. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will

live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:48-51).

The Church has struggled for centuries trying to explain what Jesus meant when He referred to His body as bread. But is it that complicated? If we see His flesh as the body that He had to carry out His purpose, then that certainly eliminates a lot of the confusion and effort to try and explain what He meant. Look at the context. Jesus said that He came to do the will of the Father. We know that His purpose was "to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). When He did that, He felt the Father's pleasure.

You also have a purpose. It is the bread of life, the bread of His presence, for you. When you eat it, you are energized and renewed. That bread sustains you. That is why so many are "starving" for His presence. They don't know what their purpose is and they are living off someone else's bread.

3. But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:32-34).

When the disciples came back to Jesus in John 4, they found Him talking to the woman at the well. When they found Him so doing, they found Him fulfilling His life purpose of seeking and saving the lost. Jesus didn't have to go looking for the lost; they came looking for Him! That is another indicator of your life purpose.

At any rate, the disciples found Jesus no longer hungry. Why? He was so excited about doing the Father's will that He didn't feel the need to eat! He told them that He had food to eat, which was fulfilling His life purpose. Of course, they didn't understand, but they would become men of purpose in time and enter into that spiritual food that comes from purpose.

4. And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

When Jesus took the bread, He was holding "his flesh" as he referred to it. This flesh was His desire to do the will of God. He asked us to eat the same bread and do it in remembrance of Him, a man (who was also fully God) who was totally committed to the purpose that God the Father had for Him.

When I eat the communion bread, it is a reminder not only that Jesus was a man of purpose but also that He expects me to be motivated by the same thing. You have a purpose to serve others; your body is to be broken on their behalf. I am *not* saying your purpose is of equal importance to that of Jesus. But we follow Him as men and women of purpose, dying to self and being renewed in His likeness. I want to eat the bread of the presence and find rest, peace and productivity in my service of and to Him.

5. Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4).

Jesus quoted the Old Testament to the devil when He was being tempted. He reminded the devil that man is sustained not only by physical bread, but by spiritual bread as well. This spiritual bread is every word that comes from the mouth of God. Paul referred to his purpose as a “heavenly vision” (see Acts 26:19). It came from the mouth of God. You too will live by what God has spoken over your life when He determined your purpose from the time you were born!

6. Give us today our daily bread (Matthew 6:11).

I am not quite ready to reinterpret the Lord’s prayer, but if man doesn’t live by bread alone, then could this request have a spiritual application as well as a natural one? When I pray for daily bread, am I only praying for food or am I asking God to give me opportunities to do His will as it is expressed in my life purpose? If I am fed by heavenly and natural bread, then could the context of this petition be a cry for purpose? What do you think?

I have found people of purpose have the ability to lose track of time and not eat when they are doing what it is they were created to do. It is said that when Handel wrote The Messiah, food trays stacked up outside his door for 17 days. He was too busy, too fulfilled, to eat. He was eating the bread of life, the bread of the presence and it sustained and nourished him. What is the bread of His presence for you?

From now on, when I say this phrase, I for one will think of this spiritual application and ask God for opportunities to serve Him as I fulfill my life purpose. I need the bread of purpose, the bread of His presence, in my life to satisfy my spiritual hunger.

I want to give you, the reader, an opportunity to stop here and to continue, at your own pace, the study of this connection between the showbread and purpose. To that end, I have included other verses that pertain to the topic for your review. You can stop here and go no further. You can read the verses below to see if there is any additional insight you can obtain. Or you can do more in depth study of these verses. Feel free to add your findings to this paper and use it however you see fit. Please reference my website if you choose to do that.

I urge you to find the bread of the presence for your life. When you do, may the Lord reveal to you what a critical role your purpose plays in serving and seeking Him.

ADDITIONAL VERSES TO STUDY THAT REFERENCE THE SHOWBREAD AND SHOWBREAD TABLE.

1. Put the bread of the Presence on this table to be before me at all times (Exodus 25:30).
2. The table with its poles and all its articles and the bread of the Presence (Exodus 35:13)
3. Then they brought the tabernacle to Moses: the tent and all its furnishings, its clasps, frames, crossbars, posts and bases; the covering of ram skins dyed red, the covering of hides of sea cows and the shielding curtain; the ark of the Testimony with its poles and the

atonement cover; the table with all its articles and the bread of the Presence (Exodus 39:33-36)

4. "All who are skilled among you are to come and make everything the Lord has commanded; the tabernacle with its tent and its covering, clasps, frames, crossbars, posts and bases; the ark with its poles and the atonement cover and the curtain that shields it; the table with its poles and all its articles and the bread of the Presence (Exodus 35:10-13).
5. "Over the table of the Presence they are to spread a blue cloth and put on it the plates, dishes and bowls, and the jars for drink offerings; the bread that is continually there is to remain on it (Num 4:7).
6. But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here-- provided the men have kept themselves from women." David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the Lord and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away (1 Sam 21:4-6).
7. Solomon also made all the furnishings that were in the Lord's temple: the golden altar; the golden table on which was the bread of the Presence; (1 Kings 7:48).
8. Some of their Kohathite brothers were in charge of preparing for every Sabbath the bread set out on the table (1 Chronicles 9:32).
9. They were in charge of the bread set out on the table, the flour for the grain offerings, the unleavened wafers, the baking and the mixing, and all measurements of quantity and size (1 Chronicles 23:29).
10. He designated the weight of gold for all the gold articles to be used in various kinds of service, and the weight of silver for all the silver articles to be used in various kinds of service:
11. The weight of gold for the gold lampstands and their lamps, with the weight for each lampstand and its lamps; and the weight of silver for each silver lampstand and its lamps, according to the use of each lampstand; the weight of gold for each table for consecrated bread; the weight of silver for the silver tables; (1 Chronicles 28:14-16)
12. Now I am about to build a temple for the Name of the Lord my God and to dedicate it to him for burning fragrant incense before him, for setting out the consecrated bread regularly, and for making burnt offerings every morning and evening and on Sabbaths and New Moons and at the appointed feasts of the Lord our God. This is a lasting ordinance for Israel (2 Chronicles 2:4).

13. Solomon also made all the furnishings that were in God's temple: the golden altar; the tables on which was the bread of the Presence;(2 Chronicles 4:19)
14. Every morning and evening they present burnt offerings and fragrant incense to the Lord. They set out the bread on the ceremonially clean table and light the lamps on the gold lampstand every evening. We are observing the requirements of the Lord our God. But you have forsaken him (2 Chronicles 13:11).
15. Then they went in to King Hezekiah and reported: "We have purified the entire temple of the Lord; the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the table for setting out the consecrated bread, with all its articles (2 Chronicles 29:18).
16. "We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God: for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, New Moon festivals and appointed feasts; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God (Nehemiah 10:32-33).
17. He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread-- which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests (Matthew 12:4).
18. He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:25-28).
19. Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Luke 6:2-5).

SPECIAL NOTE: The story of David and his men eating the showbread is mentioned in each of the first three gospels. Why do you think that is the case? What point is Jesus trying to get across? Possible clues: This story is in the context of the Sabbath rest, appropriate work, and the Lordship of Jesus.

20. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place (Hebrews 9:2).