

YOUR SEARCH FOR PURPOSE

I was in Atlanta, Georgia to meet with leaders of a church and help each leader write out a statement of life purpose. In the home of one family, a woman named Laura shared her life story with me. There was nothing out of the ordinary. She was a wife, mother, daughter, and disciple of Jesus. She had a nice home and a great family but she was struggling with one thing: She wanted to know her life's purpose.

I listened to her as I have to thousands of people. I had no agenda or preconceived notions. I didn't have a "word from the Lord" for her, nor was I seeking one. I was just trying to listen, truly hear what she was saying to see if I could find any pattern, any key that would give her some insight.

Laura began to nonchalantly share all the death that she had been around in her life. As a nurse, she had worked in the emergency room and said, "My coworkers always said that before I came on duty, there were only minor cases. But once I came on," she explained, "it was all life and death."

Life and death — those two words struck me as significant. Laura went on to tell me that four or five relatives had passed away in the last two years and she was now taking a class to help her deal with the grief. When her pastor heard about this class, he asked if she would be willing to teach it at their church. She agreed.

I said to Laura, "It seems like you have been around a lot of death. Do you find that unusual?" She looked startled and said, "Yes, but I love life so much."

I responded that it seemed that the Lord had given her a purpose to help people in life and death situations. She looked stunned and then, for the next two hours, shared all the other events in her life that pointed to this: "helping people in life and death situations" was indeed her life's purpose.

Laura's story is not unusual. It has the elements so common to those searching for their purpose. In her story, we see that

1. Her purpose was there all along. She had become so used to seeing it, to living with it, that she overlooked it in hopes of finding something more dramatic or spiritual.
2. Others were confirming her purpose, giving her feedback and compliments that she dismissed or did not take seriously.
3. There was plenty of evidence that told her this was her purpose. She didn't know how to interpret it.
4. Laura had never really tried to clearly define her purpose until that very moment. When she did, the Lord helped her. If God wants us to do His will, He must tell us what that will is.

In another seminar, a woman asked me, "My purpose in life couldn't be joy, could it?" This smiling, happy individual exuded joy from every part of her being. I said, "In a world filled with so much sorrow and pain, why couldn't your purpose be to bring the joy of the Lord?" She answered, "Well, that just seems so, so simple!" It is simple, but it is also profound and that realization had a profound impact on her life from that time forward.

I have been reminded recently of what Laurence Boldt wrote, which I mention in my book, *I Wrote This Book on Purpose*:

We make some attempt to answer them [the questions "who am I?" and "why am I here?"]. We ask our parents and teachers, and it seems they do not know. They refer us to political and religious institutions, which often crank out canned answers devoid of personal meaning. Some even tell us that life has no meaning, save for eating and breeding. Most of us are smart enough to recognize that canned answers or begging the question will not do. We must find real answers for ourselves. But that takes more heart and effort than we are often willing to give.

How much are you willing to "give" to define who you are and who you are not? Can you spend 15 minutes a day? Can you ask those closest to you how they see you and what they think your strengths are? If you are willing to spend the time, then consider prayerfully and diligently pursuing the answers to the following questions:

1. What situations seem to seek you out that you don't have to go looking for? Is there a problem that always finds its way to you to be solved? Is there a certain type of person to which you find yourself drawn and with whom you enjoy effective work or ministry? What kinds of jobs or ministries have given you the most joy?
2. What have people given you compliments about over the years that you don't think are very spiritual or special? Very often those hold clues to your purpose.
3. Is there a passage of Scripture that is especially meaningful to you because it summarizes who you are and what you do best?
4. What would you do with your life if money wasn't an issue?

May I suggest that you start a purpose journal where you can record the answers to these questions over time. And remember the words in the book of Proverbs reminding you that diligently seeking the Lord is *always* rewarded:

My son [or daughter], if you **accept** my words and **store up** my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you **call out** for insight and **cry aloud** for understanding, and if you **look for it** as for silver and **search for it** as for hidden treasure, **then** you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God (Proverbs 2:2-4, emphasis added).

As you walk out your PurposeQuest, I challenge you to make clarifying your purpose a top priority. And when you do that, you then must see how to best fulfill it in the will of God. But first, seek and keep on seeking your purpose. Don't give up and the Lord will reward you with clarity and direction.