



8

INVITATION

NOTES FROM VIDEO



SECTION ONE: NEW PURPOSE

Odds are, you want your life to matter. Christians believe this desire is the thumbprint of God on our souls . . . that thing in us that looks beyond ourselves and wonders *why . . . why are we here . . . why does anything exist?* That is a uniquely human characteristic. The notion that life is supposed to be meaningful drives us to look for meaning. It's as if we know intuitively that our individual selves are not enough. We sense that this thirst we have will never be quenched until we connect with something greater than ourselves. Eventually we realise that our individual glory isn't enough. There's no satisfaction there.

C. S. Lewis hinted at this idea when he wrote:

If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world. — *Mere Christianity*

The yearning for purpose is not a uniquely Christian experience. It is part of the human condition. But for most, it leads to frustration and disillusionment. When we're young, we dream of changing the world. But as we get older, it seems the world changes us. We are tempted to

lower our standards and adjust our expectations. If we aren't careful, we grow cynical and critical

What if God has a plan for you that is not contingent upon what you've done or even who you've been until now? What if restarting your faith is actually an opportunity to restart your life? Jesus said something to that effect. He said part of the reason he came was so that we could have *life*. About twenty years later, Paul would remind Timothy that those who follow Jesus would "take hold of the life that is truly life."

That thing in you that hopes your short time on this planet has significance beyond your time on this planet is a yearning to connect with God's plan for you. He's given you the raw materials. Talent. Opportunity. Under the canopy of his grace and mercy, those otherwise random traits and quirks take on significance. Your uniqueness positions you to play a special role in a grand story that is constantly unfolding around you. God wants you to discover the full expression of who you are. But you can't do that by yourself. Your uniqueness finds its fullest and best expression when connected to his divine purpose in the world.

The space where someone's need and your gifts meet is the space for service, an opportunity, and perhaps a calling.



Dr. Henry Cloud



SECTION ONE:

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1 When have you felt the need for deeper meaning in your life?

2 What do you see as your gifts and talents?

3 What do you think of the idea that God has a plan for your life?

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Because God has made us for Himself, our hearts are restless until they rest in Him.

 St. Augustine



SECTION TWO: EKKLESIA

In the last chapter we read about a conversation Jesus had with his disciples. He asked what the word on the street was concerning his identity. Did people think he was just another rabbi, a teacher, perhaps a zealot? After hearing a variety of answers, he stopped and asked,

“But what about you?” he asked.

“Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”
– Matthew 16:15–16

What Jesus said next is of extreme importance. If he believed Peter was caught up in the crowd-induced hysteria surrounding his miracles and teaching, this would have been the perfect time to set the record straight. After all, he had introduced the topic. But he didn’t caution Peter; he encouraged him:

Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.” – Matthew 16:17

Think about that. Jesus not only affirmed Peter’s rather extreme estimation, he went

so far as to accredit his answer to God! This was the equivalent of saying, “Peter, not only do I agree with you; God agrees as well.” But Jesus wasn’t finished.

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” – Matthew 16:18

Using a play on words, Jesus affirms Peter’s statement while revealing his vision for the future. Just like “Peter” means “rock,” Peter’s answer to Jesus’ question would be the bedrock confession of a new community of like-minded people – *the church*.

The word church in this passage is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*. To the original audience, this was not a religious term. It simply described a gathering or assembly of people called out for a specific purpose. Any type of assembly—civic, military, or otherwise—could be described as an *ekklesia*. Standing outside a city named for both a Greek king and a Roman emperor, Jesus announced

The True Church can never fail. For it is based upon a rock.

● T. S. Eliot

his plans to institute a new gathering, a unique assembly of people. The common ground of this new movement would not be a national, social, or political agenda. It would be him. It would be a gathering of people who believed that he was exactly who Peter declared him to be — *the Messiah, the Son of the living God*.

Jesus' declaration must have sounded odd (perhaps even a bit grandiose) to his disciples. After all, it was just the twelve of them plus Jesus. But Jesus did exactly what he promised to do. The fact that about two thousand years later you are participating in a conversation about Jesus is proof that Jesus was true to his word. Jesus' reference to *Hades* was a reference to death. His point was unmistakable to his original audience. Death—not even *his* death—would stop the *ekklesia* of Jesus.

As we discovered in the previous chapter, Jesus' death and subsequent resurrection empowered his followers to take his gospel into the streets of Jerusalem. There, in the very city where he was tried and crucified, the church was born. There were no buildings. No creeds. No Bible as we have it today. The church was a growing gathering of men and women who had one thing in common. They believed Jesus was the Son of God.

I am blown away that my God, who could do all this by Himself, would choose to let me be a little part of it.

 **Katie J. Davis**



SECTION TWO: QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 What do you associate with the word *church*?
- 2 Do you feel like the church has drifted from what Jesus originally intended? If so, how?
- 3 What would your response be if Jesus were to ask you, "Who do you say I am?"

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dotted lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a guide for handwriting or typing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

**the operation of the Church is entirely set up for the sinner;
which creates much misunderstanding among the smug.**

● Flannery O'Connor

SECTION THREE: YOUR NEXT STEP

Jesus did not predict a religion. He did not predict an institution. He predicted a people. He anticipated an assembly of imperfect people whose faith in a resurrected Saviour would move them to embrace a lifestyle that reflected the grace, forgiveness, and kindness of their heavenly Father. For many, however, *grace*, *forgiveness*, and *kindness* are not terms they would use to describe the local church. You may count yourself among that group. A bad church experience may have driven you away from faith. The good news is that in every generation there is a contingency of believers that refuses to view church as a place. There have always been, and will always be, Jesus followers who view the church as a movement—a movement characterised by love for one another and for the world.

No doubt you are grateful if someone invited you into this conversation. At some point, you probably felt a wave of gratitude for your group leaders. You may have wondered, *Who are all these people and where do they find the motivation and energy to do all of this?* What you've experienced and observed these past several weeks is the church. Your life has been enriched by people you don't even know doing what they are gifted to do

because someone did the same for them.

As you start or restart your faith, our hope is that discussing your questions will be a first step, not a final step. Our prayer is that your newfound or refound faith will instill in you a desire to help others rediscover their faith. In short, we hope you will take an active role in your generation's Jesus gathering.

So, take your place in the story by finding your place in the local church. This is your opportunity to do for others what others have done for you.

A life not lived for others is not a life.

● **Mother Teresa**

I used to think you had to be special for God to use you, but now I know you simply need to say yes.

 Bob Goff

SECTION THREE:
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 Where could you see your gifts and passions being used in the church?
- 2 What will you take away from this Starting Point experience?
- 3 What feels like the very next step for you in your faith journey?

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Since God knows our future, our personalities, and our capacity to listen, He isn't ever going to say more to us than we can deal with at the moment.

Charles Stanley

BOTTOM LINES FOR PART 8

-  Your uniqueness finds its fullest and best expression when connected to God's divine purpose in the world.
-  The church began as a growing gathering of men and women who believed Jesus was the son of God.
-  We have an opportunity to do for others what others did for us by joining our generation's Jesus gathering.

I think that's the true litmus test for someone who has become closer to Jesus: their heart is more loving accepting, childlike less believing that they have all the answers and more believing in Him.

 Donald Miller

