

Sam Snead/Jay Hebert... I don't know if that story is true or the kind of sports fiction that is invented at the 19th hole, but I do know that one of the lessons in the story is that our attempt to play the game like someone else may lead us into the hazard. When we try to live by the script God has written for someone else, we not only fall short of fulfilling the purpose of God for our lives but we forfeit the joy of participating in God's eternal purpose. So for the next few weeks, I want you to consider what God's purpose is, how you can know it, and how our pursuit of God's purpose informs the way we do life together as a church. So let's begin with the question, "What in the world does God want? What is His ultimate purpose?"

**1. The purpose of God is the joy of all people.** Now I hope you are thinking, "Wait a minute. That's pretty self-centered. So God's purpose is about me? Are you saying the purpose of God is to make me happy?" Not exactly. What I'm saying is that God wants to lead us on a journey into joy because joy always results in praise and that is what God is after - praise. His ultimate desire is to be acknowledged as great and praised by all people. God alone is worthy to be praised. He is more praiseworthy than sport stars, movie stars, rock stars, even military heroes or political figures. That is why the psalmist says "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised." Ps. 48:1. "For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods." Ps. 96:4. From the rising of the sun to its setting. The name of the Lord is to be praised." Ps. 113:3. God wants to be made much of. So all preaching and missions and evangelism should be aimed at helping people stop making much of themselves and start making much of their Creator. Americans should be proud that at the very top of the Washington Monument, overlooking our nation's capital, there are two five-foot high words engraved on the cap: "Laus Deo." "Praise be to God." But don't tell anyone or there is sure to be a law suit demanding their removal.

Why is God so interested in praise? C. S. Lewis struggled with God's demand for praise. What kind of God incessantly demands that we tell Him how great He is? Furthermore, how can God love ME when He is so caught up seeking His own praise? Then he made a great discovery:

"I had never noticed that **all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise**... praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians or scholars...I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation." (C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*)  
So how can we get people to praise the Lord? We could demand it. We could command it. We could manipulate it. "If you praise God He will bless you." Or we can delight ourselves in the Lord. When you enjoy something you tell others about it. The exhortation to praise God is so frequent in scripture because that is what people do when they talk about something they care about. God is the most admirable being in the universe. The demand to praise him is a demand for our maximum joy. A joyless Christian is like a sunless summer or a loveless romance.

The authors of the Westminster Shorter Catechism got it right when they wrote, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." John Piper launched a movement by changing a single word. He said (and continues to say), "The chief end of man is to glorify God **by** enjoying Him forever." **God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.** So if the purpose of God is the joy of all people then it must follow that...

**2. The joy of all people is the purpose of God.** There is no joy without purpose. In fact, without a sense of purpose we will self-destruct. Colson and Eckard...

There is no greater satisfaction in life than knowing I am being used by God for a noble purpose. That is what God has in mind for His church. Jesus did not conceive of a religious social institution that offers programs for God's people. God's people ARE God's program. The church is a community of missionaries who represent Christ wherever God has placed them. Unfortunately, we have fallen victim to a one size fits all training manual that focuses on unleashing the power of the mass. Most of our resources go toward creating spectacle rather than shaping lives. One pastor recently complained, "If it's true that God walks through the city dressed in His people, the church walls blocked our view." I have been a pastor for a long time now and I have seen church after church follow each other into the hazard. We measure success by how many people come for the program so we copy other churches that have good programs.

But if God's people ARE God's program, then this calls for a different kind of scorecard. It means seating capacity is not as important as sending capacity. Our job is not to *collect* people but to *connect* them to their calling so that every follower of Jesus can be a missionary wherever God has placed them. It is hard to find churches that are using that scorecard but we have embarked on a journey, a quest, **"to call each other to live our our God-given purpose in Christ every day."** "We see a future where believers discover how their unique story combined with their unique gifts, talents and experiences inspires them to gladly offer up their lives for the glory of God and the good of His kingdom. We see men and women who are "ordained" plumbers and teachers and doctors and business leaders who view their job as a mission field. When God's people are living on purpose for Him their joy becomes contagious and others are inspired to do likewise." So where do we start?

**3. The purpose of God is to repurpose my life.** God has made it clear that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Because we are born with this genetic condition called sin, we are disconnected from God and His purpose. In our self-centered state, we will not give Him glory nor the praise that is His due. But the Good News of the Gospel is that, "God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up with Him." (Eph. 2:4-6a). So the first thing that God does to repurpose my life is to make me alive in Christ. Then the adventure begins. Jesus disciples Me.

Do you remember Jesus' initial command to His first disciples? He said, "Follow Me and I will make you farmers...carpenters....Why fishers of men? Well it is obviously because they were fishermen. Think about that. Jesus used something they were already familiar with to cast a vision for how they could participate with Him in His mission on earth. Had they been carpenters, He would have said, "Follow Me and I'll make you builders of men." Had they been farmers, He would have said, "Follow Me and you will reap a harvest of men." But they were fishermen. He wanted them to think differently about their work.

So what's the point? You don't have to be something you're not to be a fully devoted follower of Christ. You don't have to become a religious professional. Just be you and do what you do. Begin to pursue the purpose of God not by quitting your job and becoming a missionary but by

being a missionary on your job. Sometimes we look for radical changes when all that is needed is a slight change of perspective.

In the 1930's a man named Noah McVicker, who worked for a soap company in Cincinnati, Ohio, was asked by Kroger to come up with a way to clean coal soot off wallpaper in the days before central heating. McVicker combined a little flour, water, salt, boric acid, and mineral oil, to create the cleaning compound and it did the trick. After WWII, when central heating replaced coal furnaces, sales of the cleaning putty fell sharply. Joe McVicker, Noah's nephew, who worked for the same soap company, was looking for a way to avoid the bankruptcy of the company. One day, Joe's sister-in-law, Kay Zufall, who was a nursery school teacher said that her kids liked playing with the goo better than modeling clay so she suggested to Joe that he color the stuff and market it for children to play with. They decided to call the stuff Play-Doh and they sold a lot of it. We can become so set in our ways that we never dare to dream beyond how we have always done things in the past.

There are millions of Christians who think that to follow Christ they have to become a colorless cleaning agent. The world is a sooty, sin-soaked place and our job is to clean it up. We have to work hard for God to make Him happy. Put a little elbow grease into your faith. The harder you work the happier God will be and the cleaner the world will get. Maybe that's why Christians are increasingly viewed as cranky, joyless, and out of touch with the world. Pollsters conclude that when surveyed about the church, the average person uses words like, "homophobic, judgmental and hypocritical" The church is losing traction in our culture. To many secular-minded folks the church seems as dated and as relevant as the Elks Club or the Moose Lodge.

That's not the church Jesus said He would build. God's purpose for you and for me isn't to clean up this world. God doesn't depend upon our hard work. The world isn't in the mess it's in because we aren't working hard enough. The world is in the mess it's in because there are not enough people enjoying God. The church that Jesus envisioned was more like Play-Doh than a cleaning compound. The church is a place where His people come in a wide variety of colors and shapes to bring joy and laughter into a sad and sorry world. When Jesus describes the Kingdom of God it is not a clean-up operation. The kingdom of God is a party.

Just think, apart from Kay Zufall, Joe McVickers would have been wiping soot off of walls for the rest of his life. That is why we need to speak into each other's life. That's what we mean when we say that our mission is **"calling each other to live out our God-given purpose in Christ every day."**