

In one little Midwestern town, Miss Jones had the distinction of being the oldest resident in town. So when she died, the editor of the local paper wanted to print a little article remembering this dear old lady, except he couldn't think of anything to say when he sat down to write the article. Miss Jones had never done anything terribly wrong. She had never spent a night in jail or had ever been drunk. On the other hand, she had never done anything significant.

With this still on his mind, the editor went down to the local café, and there, ran into the local funeral director. He too was having the same trouble. He wanted to put something on Miss Jones' tombstone besides "Miss Nancy Jones, born such-and-such a date and died such-and-such a date," but he couldn't think of anything to write either.

The editor decided to go back to his office and assign the job of writing up a small article for both the paper and the tombstone to the first reporter he saw. When he got to the office, he ran into the sports editor, who got the assignment. So somewhere in some little community in the Midwest there is a tombstone which reads:

Here lie the bones of Nancy Jones, For her life held no terrors.  
She lived an old maid. She died an old maid. No hits, no runs, no errors. (C. C. Mitchell)

I'm afraid to say, "That's the way many of us live our lives." We've never done anything terribly wrong, but we never accomplish anything significant for God with our lives.

Zechariah, a Jewish priest, was told before anyone else that God was setting in motion His own visit to earth. Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were known for their personal holiness. They were well suited to doing a special work for God. But they shared the pain of not having children, and in Jewish culture this was considered not having God's blessing. Zechariah and Elizabeth were old, and they had stopped even asking God for children.

One day while on duty at the temple in Jerusalem, Zechariah received an unexpected blessing. He was chosen to be the priest who would enter the Holy Place to offer incense to God for the people. Suddenly, much to his surprise and terror, he found himself face to face with an angel. The angel's message was too good to be true! But the news of the coming Savior was eclipsed by doubts about his own ability to father the child the angel promised him. His age spoke more loudly than God's promise. As a result, God prevented Zechariah from speaking until the promise became a reality.

The record of his prayer in Luke 1 is the last glimpse we get of Zechariah. Like so many people God uses and His faithful servants, he passed quietly from the scene once his part was done. He becomes our hero for those times when we doubt God and yet are willing to obey. We gain hope from Zechariah's story that God can do great things through anyone who is available to Him.

**1. Knowing your place: They were righteous in God's eyes and careful to obey**

Once again the reoccurring theme of personal holiness is shown to be important if we want to be used by God.

<sup>6</sup> *Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations.* Luke 1:6 NLT

Too often we can find ourselves coasting through life with very little attention to the spiritual areas of our lives. We rest in weekly church attendance or even working in ministry or helping others. But the first and primary concern of our lives should be our personal daily relationship with God.

What made Zechariah and Elizabeth different? What made them righteous in God's eyes? They were careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. In other words they made God's concerns their primary concerns.

They knew that finding peace with God is acknowledging Him as Lord of their lives daily. I don't know all they did to practice their faith on a daily basis but it leads us to reflect on our own practices.

How do you connect to God on a daily basis? How do you know what is best and pleasing to Him for your life?

God so wants to be involved in our lives if we would just let Him.

## **2. Knowing your purpose: They were ready to be used**

*One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week.<sup>9</sup> As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense.<sup>10</sup> While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.* Luke 1:9-10 NLT

The point is that Zechariah was doing what he was supposed to be doing. He was answering the call of God in his life by faithful service.

### **a. Knowing your purpose will give meaning to your life**

All of us were created to have a purpose and meaning in our life. People will do all kinds of odd things to discover their purpose from astrology to physics. When our lives have meaning almost anything is bearable but without it hardly anything is bearable.

Without God life has no purpose and without purpose life has no meaning. Without meaning, life has no significance or hope.

Dr. Bernie Siegel found he could predict which of his cancer patients would go into remission by asking, "Do you want to live to be one hundred?" Those with a deep sense purpose in life answered yes and were the ones most likely to survive.

## **b. Knowing your purpose will simplify your life**

When you know your purpose you will learn to evaluate which activities are essential and which aren't in your life. Like any good time management priority you will simply ask, "Does this activity help me fulfill one of God's purposes for me?"

Knowing God's purpose for us allows us to base our daily decisions, allocate our time and use our resources based on God's will instead of circumstances, pressure, and your mood at the time.

People who don't know their purpose often will try to do too much and wind up stressed, fatigued and in conflict with those around them. You will never do everything that people want you to do.

The bible says, "*A pretentious, showy life is an empty life; a plain and simple life is a full life.*" Proverbs 13:7 The Message

*You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts (purposes) are fixed on you!* Isaiah 26:3 NLT

## **c. Knowing your purpose will focus your life**

What is your life focused on? Henry David Thoreau observed that people live lives of "quiet desperation," but today we could say it is more like aimless distraction. A lot of people keep up a frantic pace going everywhere but they never get anywhere.

Without an intentional focus and purpose we continually change directions. We find ourselves changing jobs, relationships, and even churches hoping that each change will settle the confusion or fill in the emptiness in your heart.

Light is a great example of focused power. If I take a magnifying glass I can focus the rays of the sun and set paper or grass on fire. When light is focused as a laser beam it can cut through steel. There is nothing as potent and powerful as a focused life.

The apostle Paul almost spread Christianity by himself throughout the Roman Empire. Here is one of the secrets to his success:

*... but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.* Philippians 3:13-14 NLT

If you want to live an impactful and meaningful life focus it! Stop trying to do it all. Learn to say no to at least one thing a day. Do only the things that matter and that fit your purpose.

I love these verses from The Message Bible: *“So let’s keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you’ll see it yet! Now that we’re on the right track, let’s stay on it.”* Philippians 3:15-16 NLT

#### **d. Knowing your purpose will motive you**

Purpose produces passion. Nothing gives us energy like having a clear purpose for our lives.

During the height of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln often found refuge at a Presbyterian church in Washington, D.C. He would go with an aide, sit with his stovepipe hat in his lap, and never interrupt the meeting because the congregation would all be in a dither if they knew the president had come to sit in that midweek meeting. He sat off to the side, near the pastor's study, as the minister would open the Scriptures and teach God's Word and would lead the congregation in worship. The war was tearing the nation apart and tearing his soul. Having just lost his own son, Lincoln was on the bottom, and he needed solace and sustenance.

As the pastor finished his message and the people began to leave, the president stood quietly and straightened his coat and took his hat in hand and began to leave. The aide stopped him and said, “What did you think of the sermon, Mr. President?” Lincoln said, “I thought the sermon was carefully thought through, eloquently delivered.” The aide said, “You thought it was a great sermon?” Lincoln said, “No, I thought he failed.” The aide said, “He failed? Well, how? Why?” To which the president replied, “Because he did not ask of us something great.”

God has a personal plan for your life and mine every day. Think about that! We can guess at it or you can walk close enough to Him to hear it and know it.

#### **e. Knowing your purpose will prepare you for eternity**

*(A – E are from The Purpose Driven Life)*

A while back I preached a sermon about living with eternity in view. Why? Very few people leave a lasting legacy on this earth. People strive to do things that will add to their legacy. What we fail to realize is that most of the time, achievements are eventually surpassed by others, records are broken, reputations fade and trophies are thrown away.

Living to create an earthly legacy is misplaced and a shortsighted goal. We should focus our lives around building for eternity.

One day there will be a final audit of our lives and we will be examined.

*Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. <sup>11</sup> For the Scriptures say, “‘As surely as I live,’ says the LORD, ‘every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will confess and give praise to God.’* Romans 14:10b-11 NLT

On that day the things we spent our time and energy on will be assessed. The question will be did we center our lives around God's purposes on this earth so that He could use us in a maximum way.

*While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. <sup>12</sup> Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him.*

It was while Zechariah was in the sanctuary fulfilling the duties God had called him to that he heard God's plan.

*<sup>13</sup> But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. <sup>14</sup> You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, <sup>15</sup> for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. <sup>16</sup> And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup> He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly." Luke 1:11-17*  
NLT

### **3. Knowing your potential: Our reactions matter**

God never calls us to do something that we can't do unless He is just testing our willingness to trust and obey.

*Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years."*

*<sup>19</sup> Then the angel said, "I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! <sup>20</sup> But now, since you didn't believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time." Luke 1:19-20* NLT

God calls us to believe Him and obey Him. He calls us to do things that may take us out of our comfort zones. He calls us sometimes to do things that are beyond our own abilities. Zechariah and Elizabeth could not have kids on their own but when God said it would be so it happened.

I wonder what God would do through us if we believed Him 100%? I wonder what He would do in our community through His body that is gathered in this room today if we would allow Him to drive our lives?

It could be that God is not asking you to make some drastic move in your life, relationship or career. It could be that He just wants to use you where you are already planted.

In the eleventh century, King Henry III of Bavaria grew tired of court life and the pressures of being a monarch. He made application to Prior Richard at a local monastery, asking to be accepted as a contemplative and spend the rest of his life in the monastery. "Your Majesty," said Prior Richard, "do you understand that the pledge here is one of obedience? That will be hard because you have been a king." "I understand," said Henry. "The rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you."

"Then I will tell you what to do," said Prior Richard. "Go back to your throne and serve faithfully in the place where God has put you."

When King Henry died, a statement was written: "The King learned to rule by being obedient."

When we tire of our roles and responsibilities, it helps to remember God has planted us in a certain place and told us to be a good accountant or teacher or mother or father. Christ expects us to be faithful where He puts us, and when He returns, we'll rule together with Him

"Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come"(Matt 24:42).

A man named Col Davenport was speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives in the late 1700s. On May 19, 1780, the sky of Hartford darkened ominously, and some of the representatives, glancing out the windows, feared the end was at hand. Quelling a clamor for immediate adjournment, Davenport rose and said, "The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty."

*For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. <sup>12</sup> In those days when you pray, I will listen. <sup>13</sup> If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. Jeremiah 29:11 NLT*

Some take things to remember: Physical limitations do not limit God. God works in unexpected ways God has a plan for your life.

*Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Eph. 3:20 NLT*