

New hope sermon vision statement life purpose Finding Our Life Focus in God's heart for the world

Finding Our Life Purpose

In a new national survey (2016), 18-24 year-olds report that having a clear purpose in life is a big part of being a "real" adult. The problem is, most young people don't feel like they've found that sense of purpose. More than 86% of young adults say that making decisions in line with their purpose makes them an adult, according to a national survey. But only 43% say they have a clear picture of what they want in life, 36% say their career path aligns with life purpose, and only 30% know why they are here. Christine B. Whelan, a professor at University of Wisconsin-Madison concludes, "This [study] isn't good news: Coasting is existing, not thriving. The majority of young adults who say they don't have a clear picture of what they want in life also say they are existing but not thriving, while those with purpose more often say they are thriving." Her article was titled "Seek Your Purpose Before Your Paycheck." *Christine B. Whelan, "Seek Your Purpose Before Your Paycheck," Acculturated blog (5-23-16)*

Finding our life purpose is part of finding out where we place ourselves in God's great kingdom narrative. Our life focus is about how we see and what we focus on. It is what makes us a "real adult" and causes us to thrive in life – so we grow and become whole and others meet the Lord through us.'

That's our theme today. Let's pray.

I want to suggest that we will find our life focus in God's heart for the world. I think that perspective is so important I would like it to be the slogan for our church" Finding Our Life Focus in God's heart for the world. That summarizes all our vision statement into one succinct corporate goal.

Finding our Life focus in God's heart for the world.



So let's start with the big picture and then move from that to application for our individual lives. Big picture #1: The Global Scene

We want to intentionally keep our pulse on what is happening in the world – whether it's in china or Indonesia or the Philippines or South Africa.

Todd M. Johnson, director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary Global Christianity statistics, says, "The world has moved on, as we've known for some time. Protestantism has exploded in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. But the statistic that caught my attention this week was this: "Sometime around 2040 half of all Protestants will live in Africa." His conclusion, therefore, is that "We've come a long way from 16th-century German Lutherans or 19th-century American Baptists. Surely, the next 500 years clearly belongs to Africans, Asians, Latin Americans, and Pacific Islanders." The Galli report 4/7/17 That shakes up our sense a calling a bit, doesn't it? If the future of Christianity in the world is in the 2/3rds world, **how is your vocation and mine tied into people from that part of the world – directly or indirectly?**

This is, of course, what has been the fueling passion of this church: that we are equipping and sustaining people from all over the world so they can thrive back in their home countries, or as internationals wherever they live out their call. In the last 17 years of this church, God has given us people from Uganda, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, South Africa, Liberia, Madagascar, and Ghana in Africa, China, Korea, Japan, HongKong, India, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Taiwan and Mongolia in Asia, Croatia in Europe and Canada and the United States in North America. That's pretty amazing. But with the predictions about the future of the world, these members, now all over the

world, will be the history makers. They will shape world history. And we have had the privilege of walking side by side with them and thriving in our walk with Jesus Christ as Lord together.

Big picture #2: God's purposes revealed in scripture

Knowing the purposes of God revealed in Scripture is the second way we can understand God's heart for the world. The first passage that comes to mind is 2 Cor. 5. Listen to v. 18-21. And that leads us to living out God's purpose in all this:

18 *God...reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:*

19 *that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*

20 *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Committed to share the ministry and the message of reconciliation.*

Now go back to v. 16-17. The reason we get on that agenda is because **16** *So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.*

17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

We are made new creations in Jesus Christ with God's heart implanted in us by the Holy Spirit.

Our response is therefore in v. 14-15: **14** *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15* *And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

This is our motivation to be on God's agenda. Because of that motivation Rebecca, from Uganda, who is now working at the Tokyo Christian University in Japan is praying about how to reach the many foreign students who come to the university and lose their faith. She has asked for courage to start a discipling group in her home so they can have some grounding in the word of God and hold their faith in that Buddhist country and secular university. Alex Zhou is asking the same question in his university in Hong Kong. He has actually gotten a few Christians together and formed a weekly Friday night fellowship because he knows he is not living for himself but for God's purpose in his city. It is as Mother Teresa said: "By blood and origin, I am all Albanian. My citizenship is Indian. I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the whole world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to Jesus. *Mother Teresa, quoted by Ruth A. Tucker in Guardians of the Great Commission. Christianity Today, Vol. 33, no. 17.* Committing oneself to belong entirely to Jesus Christ is what it means to no longer live for ourselves.

This is actually why Ruben chose to return to northern Nigeria in the midst of the atrocities committed by Muslim extremists against Christians. He wanted to be God's shalom, God's voice of love, God's forgiveness and hope to his war-ravaged nation. It is why Zonia has gone as a missionary to Viet Nam – to raise up a generation of leaders in that war torn country who know Jesus and can help rebuild their nation by the principles and power of Jesus Christ.

Compelled, or as the word really means, *thrust out* by Christ's love as His ambassadors. And so the list goes on of member after member, just from this church alone, who is making God's heart for the world that focus of their life purpose.

Practical Application #1 Your life purpose

So what is your personal life purpose? Is it centered on your looks, your career, your status, your hoped- for marriage? Each of those goals will disappoint you and God. "Joe's wife bought a new line of expensive cosmetics guaranteed to make her look years younger. After a lengthy sitting before the mirror applying the "miracle" products, she asked, "Darling, honestly, what age would you say I am?" Looking over her carefully, Joe replied, "Judging from your skin, twenty; your hair, eighteen; and

your figure, twenty five." "Oh, you flatterer!" she gushed. "Hey, wait a minute!" Joe interrupted. "I haven't added them up yet." GCFN 8/31/17

Or is your life purpose to "be happy"? As Sam and I were talking about this last week God gave me an AHA moment. Here it is: I don't think "being happy" is a good life goal – it is not a good measuring stick with which to measure a day. Why? Because being "happy" puts all the focus on you. Making that real to me was the realization that day as we talked that the better goal was to "be grateful." I told him that it had been a hard week for me, with Keith's Full-scale dementia diagnosis and the implications for all the kinds of health care needs we have couple with my own body. I was tired and my head was adjusting to the different barometer pressures in the air and I wasn't feeling particularly stable. But in the midst of that Chris Devadatta, Marti's son, had a very productive day here finishing inputting all his edits to my book (which I hope we can send off to a publisher in another week). He also helped me get a document ready for the Maryland Retirement Committee which regulates whether Keith gets his monthly retirement check. That involved paper work and a special trip to the bank etc. but we got it done in the morning. Then in the afternoon, even though I wouldn't have chosen to do it normally, I drove Keith to the pharmacy so he could pick up his new medicine prescribed by the doctor and two other medicines that were running out. We really needed to do that trip and though I wasn't in top form, we did it! And so I end the day very grateful. To God. It is God who strengthened me to do that; who helped Chris with his edits; and who helped us get to the bank and have all our paperwork finalized so we could get Keith's checks back on track. A worthy life goal day to day is not just what we accomplish, but it is our inner character and attitude. Happy was not the right word, nor the right goal, but I was grateful, more peaceful, more settled and secure in the Lord. Those are worthy life attitudes that can be ours as we are on the right track with God in His life purposes.

The culture in general in the West today and guidance counselors in particular say your goal should be self-fulfillment. I don't think that's squares with scripture. So let me give you an example from one of my prayer partners who is pursuing her masters in TESOL at Bethel Seminary. She is a Mom with 4 grown teenage children and was a missionary with her family in Niger West Africa for 7 years. Here's the life purpose statement she wrote to gain acceptance in the Masters of TESOL at Bethel in Minneapolis. Listen and see what attitudes and obstacles weave through her goal of a TESOL degree:

"For as long as I can remember, I have found great joy in teaching. My love for teaching really began in earnest during a leadership training program at summer camp in I taught sailing, swimming, and Bible studies. Not your traditional classroom...Academics were never easy for me, so I wondered how I could be a classroom teacher... I was a very insecure learner through most of my K-12 public-school years. My lack of reading and spelling skills were the by-product of the whole language approach introduced in the mid-70s. I remember my dad often saying to me when I asked him how to spell a word, "Sound it out!" I had no idea what he was asking me to do. My struggle with reading and writing only became more apparent in my high school years Finally my English teacher stated, "It seems you will never learn to write."

My freshman year at Bethel University my freshman year drastically changed that prognosis. I had a fantastic writing professor who introduced me to good literature and the writing lab! Never before had I had such an encouraging teacher. Through her I learned to write with clarity and confidence. . My progress as a learner steadily increased at Bethel as many of my other professors also helped me to strengthen my academic skills.

As my confidence grew, I explored many other learning experiences after Bethel. Most recently, I am enrolled in an online Simeon Trust Course called *First Principles*. This group provides ongoing training for Bible teachers. I am taking the course with two other ladies from my church. In addition this past fall I took the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment. *Learner* ranked second on my top five signature themes. That realization was an eureka moment for me. Each of my other dominant themes - *Relator*, *Input*, *Connectedness*, and *Deliberative* - also confirm that I am in a good place to...pursue the Master of Arts in Teaching at Bethel University in order to obtain licensure for TESOL, grades 5-12. Through the Master of Arts in Teaching program at Bethel I will be qualified to teach English language learners in a setting where my training and experiences will be utilized for the benefit of the community.

So that I can maximize this learning opportunity through the master's program at Bethel,, I will be reducing work hours at my church. I have had some leadership responsibilities with SALT that I will also stop once I begin at Bethel. Plus, as a mother of young-adult children, I will be less encumbered when three of them leave in the Fall for university and work overseas.

In preparation for beginning the program, I have also been actively pursuing resources that will prepare me for overseas teaching. One such book is *Teaching Cross-Culturally*, by Judith E. Lingenfelter and Sherwood G. Lingenfelter. I wish I had read it sooner! Reading about traditional learning strategies helps explain the radical difference between the western education system and school systems in developing countries. The authors ask the question, "How then do we bridge these cultural differences and create classrooms in which effective teaching and learning takes place among people of different cultures?" (Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter, 52) They suggest, "The goal of the incarnational teacher is to create a learning context that is familiar to students yet stretches them beyond their previous experiences" (52). I look forward to reading more about the details of such a classroom.:

I believe the TESOL licensure for grades 5-12 will contribute to my effectiveness as a teacher living in a local or international community. I sense the Lord's call to this Kingdom work, being a blessing in the context the Lord places me. May it be so as I become better equipped to go out into the world and teach English." Carmen Gunderson Statement of Purpose-Applicant for M.A. in Teaching Bethel University July 2017

This is what we are talking about. Carmen had to overcome many obstacles as a learner, but she is on track now to take her place in God's kingdom agenda for the world.

Carmen recommended Amy Sherman's book *Kingdom Calling* when I spoke with her this week. I am reading it now. Here is what Amy says: we - saved sinners - are part of God's plan to heal the world" (Sherman, 87). "We have a purpose, we have a sacred calling, we have a God-given vocation: to partner with God in his work of restoring all things" (Idem).

To partner with God. How do we do that? She goes on: "We are called not only to conform to Christ's character (what Dambudzo preached about last week), but also to Christ's passions and identity. He was passionate about justice...He was passionate about reconciliation among diverse peoples..He was passionate about the poor, the sick, the vulnerable and the stranger...**To become like Him is to adopt these passions as our own.**" (Sherman, Ibid.,, p. 82).

Practical application #2

So here are 4 simple guidance questions you can ask as you seek to work out the life purpose with God:

1. Does this choice fit in with Christ's Kingdom agenda or just enlarge me?
2. Does this move me closer to God's heart or further away?
3. Is love at the center of this?
4. What is the counsel of the most godly people we know?

How we answer those questions really is based on how much of God's Word is in our hearts and how our heart reflects God's heart.

Let's pray.

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 9/10/17