

True Identity, True Purpose

Identity theft... it happens all the time. Every 79 seconds, a case of identity theft is reported in America. You hear advertisements about protecting yourself from identity theft because it causes such financial and emotional distress. Yet the greatest identity theft of all time continues, as humans succumb to the duplicitous temptations (of Satan) to find their identity apart from their Creator. When our true identity as God's good creation, made in His image, designed for close relationship with Him, is stolen we meander through life under a false identity.

But no thanks to the world, our true identity can be restored through Christ Jesus. The most important thing that can happen in our life is finding your identity in Christ and not allowing your identity and your purpose to be stolen by the world, for that is the most destructive identity theft of all.

Is There Purpose To Living?

For several weeks I've been talking about identity and then belonging. You may recall that the most important question anyone can ask is "Who am I?" Subsequent to that question is this one, "Who do I want to be?" And then, "Where do I belong?" We can add to those questions another one: "What is my purpose in life?" Now, most people live their entire lives without ever knowing "WHY?" Most people exist year after year with no clear idea of why they are here, or God's purpose for their lives. Yet, one of the most basic questions a person can ask is, "What is the meaning of my life?"

The point I want to make today is that knowing your true identity, found in God, is the key to fulfilling your purpose in this life. Many people and organizations and governments will try to tell you your purpose in life. But your true and eternal purpose comes from your Creator.

Everyone wants to be happy. People try in many ways: Some look for happiness by acquiring wealth and possessions. Some look for happiness by experiencing pleasure. Some look for happiness by gaining power & prestige. All these pursuits become their purpose in life. Recently, pod-caster Dave Rubin on "The Rubin Report," talked about how American society has lost its sense of purpose leading to a "crisis of meaning" in America. Part of the problem observed is that so many messages in the culture have been saying for a long time "we found the meaning." And the meaning was "do what you want to do," "if it feels good, do it." Meaning isn't found in responsibility, they say, but in rebelling against "the system." And when it turns out that a lot of people don't find meaning in that, there is still a God-shaped hole in people's hearts that,

tragically, is being filled by hatred, polarization, tribalism and plain old narcissism.

The various rights crusades today have spawned a grievance culture among us. Young people used to be taught to bear their shortcomings or privations with patience and equanimity, and to focus on being grateful for what one had, instead of being upset because of what one does not have. Here's the truth: Life is unfair. It can be a slog. But when you allow God to use you to do something to make life better for others you find your purpose and meaning, and that brings joy. A luxury car in your garage won't do it. You need to do something with meaning.

Finding Real Happiness

But real happiness comes from understanding my purpose in life and fulfilling it. The Bible tells us that God made you and me in order to love us. *...just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will...* Eph. 1:4-5. We hear people say, "God is love." But love is meaningless until it is bestowed on someone. That's what God has done for us – He's bestowed His love upon us. He didn't abandon us to meander and strive in a sin-controlled world. Instead, He sent His only Son to lead us to freedom.

We were created to have freedom and a personal relationship with God, and to manage all of the rest of God's creation. *...God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it,* Gen. 1:27-28. We're not just any other animal. We have special abilities and responsibilities on this earth – not to destroy it, but to manage it for the owner, who is God.

When we know and love God, and live in harmony with His purpose for our lives, it produces tremendous benefits and meaning in our lives. God has destined us to have meaningful and purposeful lives. As Jesus said, *I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly,* John 10:10.

Know The Planner, Know The Plan

Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails, Proverbs 19:21. All the works of human hands melt and crumble in nature's crucible. And nature itself fades and fails in God's hands. Through all the melting and crumbling, all the fading and failing, God's nail-pierced hands hold us if we let Him.

Don't go looking for the plan of your life. Look for the Planner. Know God – He will show you the plan as it unfolds. The Holy Spirit turns up the light so you can see more clearly God's path in life and what He has for you to do. Many

Christians find hope in the words of the prophet Jeremiah: *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future,* Jer. 29:11. But it's the following verses that are most important, for they tell us how we find this plan of God, *Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart,* Jer. 29:12-13. To find our purpose in life we must engage in the purpose of knowing God.

If you want to know God's plan for your life, if you want to know God's will, you must get to know the Planner. And He's not just a Planner, He is a Person with a plan. His purpose to redeem all humanity to Himself. His plan is to use you and me to advance something bigger in history.

...in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation, 2 Corinthians 5:19. We all have abilities to advance God's cause in this life: in your life, in your family, in your church, and beyond. Christian author Frederick Buechner once wrote, "The world says, the more you take, the more you have. Christ says, the more you give, the more you are." Christians aren't merely consumers. We are destined to be contributors. We don't watch. We engage. We give. We sacrifice. We encourage. We pray by laying hands on the hurting. We do life together, encouraging one another to seek the Lord and fulfill His purpose. Are you living on purpose? Or are you just going with the flow? If you go with the flow you'll be like water, ending up at the lowest point. If you go with God you are headed for glory.

Pursue His Person, He will restore your fortune. It's never too late, even if you've been separated from God for a long time. Don't look in the rear-view mirror of your life ... Keep looking through the windshield, going forward. God still has purpose and a good plan for you ... you need to get to know Him and work with others who know Him.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do, Ephesians 2:10.