

PURPOSE AND PASSION

Imagine your life with me.

Imagine you have discovered your God-given purpose.

Imagine you are filled with a passion for that purpose.

Imagine you see yourself as God sees you:

loved by the Father,
forgiven and accepted in Christ;
gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Imagine you have overcome your fears and your insecurities.

Imagine that the prizes and the pleasures and the praises
of this world mean little to you.

You know

who you are,
why you're here,
and what you are to do with your life.

See yourself

standing before the world,
confident and certain of your calling,
afraid of nothing but failing God.

Imagine what you could do with your life.

And imagine the joy you would know.

One last thing.

Your life in this world is over.

You are standing before God.

All you have done is displayed before you.

And when it is finished,

God turns to you and smiles.

And you hear him say,

“Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

That's who you are meant to be.
That's the life you were created to live.
That's the joy you can experience in this world
and in the world to come.

And I believe that's the life most of you want to live.

Today we're looking at your major complaint with your life.

We took three weeks to look at your major complaints with yourself –
procrastination, impatience and pride.
Today is a little different.
It's your primary complaint with your life –
what you most wish was different.

You guys who filled out the survey last spring
did a great job on all the questions.
But this one –
wow, you were really honest and transparent.
Thank you.

Some of you regretted moral mistakes you had made.
Others of you regretted some of your past financial and business decisions.
Many of you regretted not coming to faith in Jesus earlier in life.
Many of you regretted working too much and not being there for your family.
And many of you wish you had done more to help your children come to faith.

**However, the most common response BY FAR on the survey –
your number one complaint with your life –
is that you lack a great purpose and real passion.**

You wrote:

I am not sure I am fulfilling my purpose for God.
I'm missing something to be passionate about.
Why am I here?
I know God has a plan but I don't know what it is.
Not living a full life of purpose
and at the same time not knowing what to do.

I am disappointed by my contribution to the lives of others.

I should have done more.

I sometimes think God created me to be more than I am.

I don't know even what that would be,
or how to get there.

You want to live the life I asked you to imagine a minute ago –
a life of purpose and passion.

But you resonate with the Ed Sissman poem I have quoted before.

Men past forty
get up nights
look out at city lights
and wonder where they made the wrong turn
and why life is so long.

And you're afraid that one day the story of your life might be told in the words
of John Greenleaf Whittier.

For of all sad word of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: "It might have been."

Listen,
it's never too late to fulfill your purpose;
it's never too late to be filled with passion;
it's never too late to say "yes" to the adventure you were created to live.

First, let's talk about purpose.

Your life will never be greater
than the purpose you live for.

If your life purpose is
making a name for yourself, or
making a fortune for yourself, or
fulfilling your physical desires, or
even making a better person of yourself,
then your life will never be greater than yourself.

And I don't care how big you get,
a life that is no bigger than self
will be Too small to satisfy the deepest longings within your heart.

That's why so many of you wrote about wanting – really, needing –
a greater purpose to live for.
You have what the world says you need for a fulfilling life
but you know something is missing.
You sense you were made for more.
That's because you were.

Ecclesiastes 3.11: He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity
in the human heart ...

This life is filled with moments of beauty and wonder.
And it can bring us real joy.

Last Friday John Hull and I and two guys from the church
were down on the field at Minute Maid,
unfurling the flag before game 1 against the Rays.

Picture

Then we watched JV throw seven masterful innings.
And it was a great day and a wonderful time.

But even in our best moments,
something within us knows that we are eternal beings
and wants to live for things that will matter forever.
We know we were made not for ourselves and our happiness
but to make a difference in the lives of others.

So if you're feeling
you need to find a greater purpose for your life,
that's not a reason to despair;
it's a reason to rejoice.

The desire within many guys for worldly success and worldly pleasures
is so great that it dulls the desire for a life that is eternally significant.
But, not you.
You know you were made for more
and that's a good thing.

What kind of purpose is worthy of your life
and will fulfill your inner desire to do something that truly matters?

If the Gospel is true,
the purpose you are seeking will
(1) glorify God and
(2) bring good into the lives of others.

I tell you all the time that the goal of the Christian life
is to become more like Jesus.
And that's definitely true when it comes to the purpose we should live for.
What drove his actions and created the life he lived
should motivate and shape our lives, as well.

Knowing what it would mean and the cost he would have to pay,
the night before his death,
Jesus prayed: My soul is troubled.
What shall I say?
Father, save me from this hour?

Then he continued.

John 12.27-28: No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your
name.

Jesus lived and died to glorify to the Father.

He wanted the world to
comprehend the character of the Father through his life,
be reconciled to the Father by his death, and
glorify the Father with their lives and their words
because of what he revealed.

In another place Jesus said,

John 4.34: My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

Our purpose in life must somehow
do the Father's will in such a way that he is glorified.

And our purpose,
if we are to be like Jesus,
our purpose must also make the lives of others better.

Luke 19.10: The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.

and

Matthew 20.28: The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life
as a ransom for many.

You and I are not going to be called to die for the salvation of others,
but we are called to follow in the pattern of Jesus.
That means living a life that cares about those who are lost from God
and serve those in need.

That's why I say that our life purpose
must in some way glorify God and bring good into the lives of others.

There are many different ways of doing this.
There are so many different needs,
so many different ways that people are broken,
so many different ways to reach people with the Gospel
and bring God into their lives,
that we shouldn't expect that all of us would have the same
exact way of glorifying God or all have the same way of serving others.

You have many, very important responsibilities.
Wife, kids, parents, friends, work, house.
And you can be a witness to the goodness of God
and a caring, loving presence in all of those relationships and places.

And there are times,
when that's all you can do.

Years ago,
in Wesley Hall I'm getting ready for Quest at the sound booth,
and a young guy comes up and says,
"Rob, I feel really bad that I haven't been doing as much for the church
as I used to.
But don't give up on me.
I'm going to get back to being more involved."

I looked at him and said,
"Dude.
You have five kids under ten.
And three of them are two-year old triplets.
That's your ministry right now.
You don't have to feel bad about not doing more for the church."

So, there are seasons when just
holding it together
being a good husband and father and
going to work
are about all we can do.

But most of us aren't in that season.
There's room in our lives;
in fact, there's a need in our lives,
for some purpose that's bigger than ourselves,
something we believe in enough to care about and sacrifice for.

Some of us,
we just know.

John Hull,
our missions pastor –
comes to faith,
leaves his job as an executive with J&J, and
knows he's called to missions.

Serves in the desert of Mexico where he does incredible things
in the harshest of conditions.
And then begins to lead TWUMC
so that missions,
here in Montgomery County and all around the world,
is at the heart of what we do.

I'm sixteen,
a summer youth director leads me to faith.
And in no time I know that

- (1) I am supposed to be a pastor in the United Methodist Church
and tell people how to accept Jesus and
- (2) I am supposed to make the United Methodist Church
more what God wants it to be.

Sixteen years old and I know that.
Now I'm sixty-four and
by god's grace I've been given an opportunity to do that.

I know we're both pastors.
That's not you.
You're not going to become ordained
and work full time on a church staff.

And you don't have to.
You're not supposed to.

But you should have some way in particular
that you sense you are called
to glorify God and bring good into the lives of others.

There are so many examples I could give you from members of our church,
men just like you
and women in our congregation
who are living with a real sense of purpose and mission.

One of our Quest guys,

Dennis Woodley is a lay chaplain with the Texas Department of Corrections.
In 2000 he began working with a prison ministry called Kairos.

Over 200 of our members

have been involved with Kairos or a similar ministry called Jubilee.

It' like Emmaus for inmates.

A three-day spiritual experience where inmates

hear talks on God's love and power,

talk about their lives, and

worship.

Dennis was invited to go to Kairos by another man in our church.

And his first experience was overwhelming.

He said he had never seen the Spirit move

in such a powerful and visible way.

It was like a bomb going off

and the darkness of that place was overcome with the light of the Gospel

and lives were changed.

For several years he went.

Every time a powerful experience for the inmates

and fulfilling for Dennis.

But he wanted more.

He wanted to serve more, do more, help more.

And the day came when the chaplain said he needed someone to teach

a spiritual class for the inmates once a week.

And Dennis said,

I can do that.

So for six years,

he has prepared and worked and led a class

for inmates weekly.

I've been there once.

50 guys were there.

And let me tell you,
they love them some Dennis Woodley.
And he loves them.
And he loves the fact that he has a purpose
that glorifies God and brings good into the lives of others.

Dennis is a guy like you.
He sits at a Quest table just like you.
He's had challenges in his family just like you.
And he's living a life that glorifies God
and makes the lives of others better.

Another Quest guy.

After our first session this fall,
I spoke with him.
Brilliant financial guy.
He's been wanting to do some real kingdom work.

He's been to Central America
where the men from Quest do so much of our mission work.
Not really his thing.

That's ok.
Ain't everything for everybody.
Not all of us are made to be human cement mixers.
I wasn't until I bulked up.
And now I'm a machine.
But back to our story.

One of his friends, Jeff, spoke with him about a ministry
here in Montgomery County that helps homeless people.
Compassion United.

A year ago he and his table mates
heard four of our guys talk about the mission work they're
doing in Honduras.

They looked into what they could do
to invest themselves in a particular community.
And God has used them to
complete a medical clinic,
expand a school, and
grow a credit union that supports local farmers.

Their talk impacted Jeff and some of his friends
to want to do more.
And now they are working with Compassion,
clearing land for a homeless facility,
serving on the board, and
raising funds.

Photo

So, back to our story.
Jeff tells the finance guy, also named Jeff, to look into serving with Compassion.

He does.
He likes what he sees and they need his skill set.
Now he's the treasurer
and he's making certain they do everything properly.

That's important –
when you're dealing with God's money,
you want things done right and
you want things done efficiently.
And if you ask people to support a parachurch ministry
they often want to see how you're spending your money
and if you're a really good investment.
And he's making certain all that is happening.

I wish you could have seen
the smile on his face when he told me
how this ministry was making a real difference in the lives of people,
how it was successful in helping people get out of homelessness and
poverty, and
how happy he was to be a part of it.
And how it has provided a real sense of purpose in his life.

Now both Jeffs, and Dennis and the guys doing mission work in Honduras
are studs in their own way.

But so are you.

You have gifts and abilities and talents
that God can use,
that will help you find and fulfill a God-given purpose.

Some of us are given the gift from God of just knowing –
here's what I'm supposed to do with my life.

But more of us wander into it,
at least that's what it looks like.

Of course, God know what he's doing
and how to lead us.

I know this doesn't fit everyone's personality,
but I believe you are going to be most effective
not by doing a little good for God here and a little good for God there.

But you'll accomplish the most
and receive the greatest satisfaction and joy
when you find a place, a ministry, a purpose
where you invest yourself deeply,
pour yourself into it regularly and over the long haul.

Let's talk for a minute about living with passion.

Having a sense of passion is wonderful – and terrible.
It gives you something you love and the power to do it.

It fills your being with excitement and energy.
But it also causes you to care so deeply that it's painful
and work so hard that it's emotionally and physically draining.

If you were in Loft a few weeks ago,
you heard me talk about Cliff Ritter.
Sorry if this is a repeat for you.

Picture

Cliff was in the business world
 when God called him into ministry in the early 90's.
 At the time he was a member of a church that I pastored
 on the west side of Houston.

He went to seminary
 and went to work for prolific writer and speaker Chuck Swindoll.
 When people listened to Swindoll on the radio or read his books,
 they would often call or write his office about a problem they were
 having.
 And – Cliff would take their calls and talk with them
 or he'd respond to their letters.

Stew Grant was our pastor of caring ministries
 when he felt led to go back to school and get his doctorate.
 He had done a great job
 and we had a real hole to fill.
 We interviewed several candidates,
 but none of them seemed right for the position.

Then I thought of Cliff.
 I told Dr. Robb I think I know the right guy.

We brought him down,
 and here's how I introduced him to other pastors.
 Cliff,

I gotta be honest.
 I love people and I like helping them,
 but this position you're looking at –
 I don't know, man.
 Every day just about all day
 talking to people about their problems –
 broken marriages,
 people worried about their kids,
 folks suffering in the hospital,
 all the human drama, and
 all the emotional pain –
 if that was my day, every day,
 I think I would find a bridge to jump off.

Cliff said,

Oh, no, those are the best times ever
to be there for someone.

There's no better time and no greater privilege
than bringing Jesus into all of that pain and that confusion.

People are open then,
and if you can step into that moment and be there for them,
great things can happen.

I care about hurting people.
Cliff has a passion for hurting people.

And I'm glad he does.
It's a great ministry –
but it's not an easy life.
Even with a passion for it.
It's hard,
it's tiring,
it's demanding, and
it's draining.

That's the way it is with a passion.
It will fill you with a sense of calling,
and it will call you to give all of yourself.
And you won't be able to imagine your life without it.

So, we want to be filled with a passion for something.
None of us growing up ever dreamed of a life where we
didn't feel,
didn't care,
didn't believe in anything enough to give it our best.

And that's why so many of you wrote on the survey
that this was your biggest complaint about your life.
No real passion.

When there's no passion,
 life is just passing time.
 We're just going through the motions,
 wondering where we took the wrong turn and why life is so long.
 But if you don't have a great passion for a great cause,
 because we need to feel alive,
 because we want something to give ourselves to,
 we will find smaller causes,
 even destructive causes,
 to feel passionate about.

It may be a football team, golf, poker, travel.
 I'll give you a pass right now if you're passionate about the Astros.
 And there's nothing wrong with having hobbies and interests
 that at the same time challenge our minds and revive our spirits.
 It's ok to be passionate about small things
 unless it becomes the big passion of our life.

And for many of us that's what happens.
 What consumes our time and our energy and our hearts
 are matters that in the light of eternity are nothing more than trivial pursuits.

There are other passions –
 making money,
 accumulating the physical comforts of life,
 the pleasures of the flesh,
 professional success –
 in and of themselves nothing really wrong with them,
 except when they become the great passions of our lives
 and we ask them to provide us with meaning and significance.
 Then all they do is
 distract our attention,
 dwarf our souls and
 disfigure our spirits.

Because they're not about glorifying God or bringing good into the lives of others.

But here's the problem.
It's hard to generate passion.
It's difficult to find a purpose that you haven't felt strongly about
and then will yourself to feel passionate about it

So, what's a guy to do?

First, ask yourself some questions.

If you knew you could not fail,
what would you attempt for God and his kingdom?
If you could make only one difference in the world,
what would it be?
What issue, what need, what particular group of people
do you feel a burden for?

Spend some time with these questions
and you'll start getting in touch with a God-given passion
that's within your heart.

Here's another question?
What has made a big, positive difference in your life?
What has helped you get to a better place
relationally, emotionally or spiritually.
Often, that's where you'll find your passion.

Again, I used this in the Loft recently,
but I want to show you a video of an interview with Terry Loughridge.
Terry is my administrative assistant
and, among many other things,
does all the work to get Quest together for us every week.

Video: Terry Loughridge

I meant what I said there.
Terry is a life changer.

Professionally,
she didn't have what the others in that room had.
All great people.

But I could see that she had passion.
Listen,
I would rather have someone with passion
than someone with skills and knowledge.

I can teach you skills,
but I can't teach you passion.
I can impart knowledge to your brain,
but I can't impart passion to your heart.

If you have the passion,
you'll learn the skills and you'll get the knowledge,
and you will do kingdom work and you will change lives.

And why was this a passion for Terry?
Because the course helped her.
A single mother of three,
wondering how she was going to provide the kind of life for her kids
that she felt they deserved.

Learning godly financial principles,
including putting God first in your finances and in all of your life,
made a huge difference for her.
And she was
enthusiastic,
driven,
passionate about bringing the same gift into the lives of others.

That was part of my calling into the ministry.
 I was in Sunday school or church just about every week of my life.
 And nobody had told me about needing to accept Jesus as my personal Savior.
 Nobody had talked to me about having a relationship with Jesus.
 And I knew how that had changed my life,
 and I wanted to bring that gift into the lives of others,
 good Methodist folk in
 good Methodist churches and
 never hearing about accepting Christ.

So, ask yourself,
 what has been most helpful to you.

How were you lost?
 Where have you been wounded,
 where have you suffered,
 where have you been broken,
 and God has brought you healing and wholeness.

It's very possible that's where you'll find your passion.
 And that's where you'll discover a gift God has given you
 to bring into the lives of others.

2 Corinthians 1.3-4: All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us
 in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled,
 we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.

One of the ways that God redeems our suffering and our pain
 is that he gives us an ability to care for others.

When you go through hard times,
 it's possible for your heart to become hard.
 You can become bitter and angry about the hurt you have suffered.
 Or, suffering can make your heart soft,
 tender towards others who are hurting,
 sensitive to their struggles, and
 wise enough to know what to say
 and what not to say.

If you have suffered,
if you have found healing,
if God has brought you comfort,
you have a gift to give and
it very well may be there that you will find your passion.

Have you overcome alcoholism or some other addiction?
Have you lost a child or a spouse
and God has brought you healing?
Have you been devastated by disease
but your faith brought you through?
Have you suffered financial or career setbacks
but God taught you how to trust in him and
to overcome your fear.
Have you worked through a broken marriage
and now it's a blessing?
Have you struggled with depression or PTSD
or with a child who make terrible mistakes that impacted your life
as well as theirs?

If you have,
you have a gift to share that will help other people.
Remember what it was like when you were in that place,
remember how desperate and alone you were,
remember what helped you,
and it's possible you will find your calling there.

Last thing to say,
if you don't know what to do – do something.
Don't wait for clarity,
don't wait for a calling,
don't wait for passion.

You don't know what to do with your life?
Do something.

These are easy.

Foster children in Montgomery County need mentors,
both before and after they age out of the system.

Connect with Angel Reach.

Or go to the lunch that is held here the first Friday of every month
to learn how to help foster children.

Human trafficking is rampant –
right here in Houston.

Go to the panel discussion this Thursday in the Harvest worship center
led by the Montgomery County Coalition Against Human Trafficking.

Men and women live under the overpasses on 45.

Serve meals to the homeless with our mission team
every Saturday.

Work on one of the church's Habitat for Humanity houses.

Every quarter we provide shelter, food and transportation
for homeless families right here in The Loft with Family Promise.

Sign up to help out the next time you see it advertised.

Go on the next Quest mission trip to Honduras,
November 14-17.

Get involved in prison ministry.

Pick one – anyone of those.

Will it become a passion for you?

It very well might.

But even if it doesn't,
it will get you moving.

And a ship that is moving is easier to steer
than one that is anchored in the harbor.

God is much more likely to guide you if you're out doing his work
than if you're sitting around waiting for lightning to strike.

Do something
and it will lead to something else
and eventually you'll find your purpose
and when you do, passion will come.

Don't wait for the perfect purpose.
Don't wait for an overwhelming passion.

Do something.
Invest yourself in something
that glorifies God and brings good into the lives of others,
and purpose and passion will come.