



Priorities

Introduction

“Priorities” is a stewardship emphasis program that asks Christians to decide what is really important in their lives and then to plan activities according to those purposes. It is intended that taking time for this planning process will result in a filter that participants can use in their daily decision making.

This curriculum is designed to reach people in a variety of places, without the active church members hearing the same thing over and over. All high school and adult members should receive letters that keep them posted as to the theme each week. The most in depth study will be received by those who attend Sunday school. The importance of purpose is covered in the small group Bible study. The church leaders are addressed in a separate meeting to request their support for this teaching and answer any questions that they may have.

Note that the commitments from this program do not include specific dollar amounts for the church. In the author's experience, better projections of future income can be made from past trends than from pledges. Not requesting this information about the support of the church helps the members understand that the goal is the teaching of Christian living principles, not fund raising.

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This copy of the “Priorities” curriculum has been customized for Sample Church.

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- Handouts may be reproduced to have available for each Bible study attendee.
- Leader's notes may be reproduced for each Bible study leader.

The authors are indebted to Vision Foundation for material adapted from their booklet, “Establishing Your Purpose,” in the *Ministry in the Marketplace* Series. This booklet may be ordered from their distributor, CBMC, at 800-566-2262 (or online at www.cbmc.com , or through CBMC, Inc., P.O. Box 8009, Chattanooga, TN 37414-0009.

Some material is also included from *Living the Abundant Life*®, a seminar on personal and family finance written by Steve and Nita Dossin.

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Schedule

Activity	Date
Submit newsletter teaser for December	November 15, 2008
Submit newsletter article for January	December 15, 2008
Mail first letter	December 29, 2008
First Sunday School	January 11, 2009
Worship service emphasizes purpose	January 11, 2009
Mail second letter	January 12, 2009
Stewardship committee commitments due	January 18, 2009
Second Sunday school	January 18, 2009
Leadership meeting	January 18, 2009
Mail third letter	January 19, 2009
Leadership commitments due	January 25, 2009
Third Sunday School	January 25, 2009
Mail fourth letter	January 26, 2009
Fourth Sunday school	February 1, 2009
Worship service celebrates God's provision	February 1, 2009
Receive commitments	February 1, 2009
Continue to receive commitments	February 8, 2009
Mail survey to nonrespondents	February 10, 2009
Thank you letter to those who have responded	February 13, 2009
Submit newsletter report for March	February 15, 2009

Tasks/Requirements

Correspondence - There is a series of letters included in this program. They should be individually addressed to *each high school and adult member* of the congregation. They may be put in one envelope per family to save postage. To accomplish this, the letters should be produced on a computer with the capability of merging names and addresses. The text of the letters can be provided on diskette. Also, a data base design can be provided if the computer is using the Access data base.

Note: The authors can provide the computer support for this program, but that would have to be on a hourly fee basis.

Copying - There is a two-sided handout for three of the Sunday school classes. The commitment form needs to be copied for each high school and adult member of the church, plus a supply of extras for those who do not bring them to the third Sunday school class as requested. There is also a two-sided handout for the home Bible study.

Record keeping - Results will need to be tabulated and reported at three different stages of the campaign. It would probably be appropriate to use the same computer data base as is used for the correspondence.

Teachers - Teachers are needed for four Sunday School lessons for both adults and youth separately.

Worship emphasis - Two sermons need to be written and given, one at the beginning and one at the end of the emphasis time. This curriculum includes some ideas for the topics.

Home Bible study leaders - This curriculum includes a Home Bible Study for churches that have these groups. If this is to be used, it may be appropriate to have a training meeting with the leaders of those groups.

Leadership meeting - This program asks congregation leaders to commit in advance of the rest of the congregation. Therefore, a meeting should be scheduled to request the leaders to make their commitments.

Collection of commitments - An attractive, high visibility box is needed that may be set out to receive commitment forms. Collection of commitment cards will also take place during worship on one Sunday.

Lasting reminders - The purpose statements from the commitment forms turned in are typed up in large print and laminated as reminders.

Publicity

Newsletter teaser for December

This paragraph may also be used as a bulletin announcement during the Sundays before the stewardship emphasis begins.

Does your life have purpose? Or are you controlled by circumstance? Find out how to reclaim your life for the more important things. Watch for Priorities, a special theme to be studied to .

Newsletter article for January

In business, committees and projects often have purpose statements. Churches have mission statements. Properly used, these statements keep all activity focused on its purpose. Does your life have purpose? Or are you controlled by circumstance? During the next few weeks, you will be challenged to write a purpose statement for yourself, to decide what is really important.

To be an effective member of God's kingdom, you must understand that eternal matters should be our top priority in life. When you realize that the short time that you live on earth makes a difference in how you spend eternity, the importance of keeping your focus on eternal matters becomes evident.

Once you have written a purpose statement, you have a guide for your activities. The activities that you undertake will also be affected by your spiritual gifts, talents, and the roles in which God has placed you. You will also be asked to decide on some of the activities that you will undertake in the next year. Find out more about this process by attending the Sunday school course, Priorities, to .

Newsletter report for March

The 2009 stewardship emphasis, titled Priorities, is now behind us. Commitment forms have been turned in. During this process, members and friends of Sample Church were asked to spend some time deciding on a purpose in life, what is really important. The response was really encouraging. Many shared their personal purpose statements on the commitment forms. Here are just a few:

[Insert three or four examples from the commitment forms received, ending with one which strongly reflects the mission of your congregation.]

Based on the activities that were committed to, this last one seems to be a theme of the congregation. ___% of those turning in commitment forms indicated that they would be involved with a Bible study. Hopefully, through the attention to God's Word and the encouragement from these groups, we will be able to live more Christianly. *[Some other congregation specific strength may be pointed out here.]*

While we can all improve our lives in all the categories of activities included on the commitment form, the results in some of the categories showed a large number of people not participating in important areas of a Christian life. The following is a tabulation of the results:

Activity	Percent Identifying Participation in This Activity	Percent Remaining With a Growth Opportunity in This Category
Weekly worship	___	___
Regular Bible study	___	___
Daily devotions/prayer	___	___
Tithe	___	___
Offering	___	___
Living as a witness	___	___
Sharing the Gospel	___	___
Ministry	___	___

Also, ___ people were specifically named to hear the Gospel from this church. That is exciting, but each member of the church should have several people that they have identified as needing to hear about salvation, so the number should be much larger.

Also exciting was the fact that ___ people committed to get involved in a new ministry. The names of those expressing interest in a new ministry within Sample Church have been provided to the appropriate ministry leaders.

Taking time to evaluate priorities has brought spiritual growth. May the Lord help us to keep these commitments to Him!

Correspondence

Mail individual letters to *each high school and adult person*. All the letters for a family can be in one envelope to save on postage and supplies.

1. - Introducing the stewardship emphasis – December 29, 2008

Dear (name):

You may have noticed something different this year. There was no stewardship emphasis time last fall. We are starting that teaching now. The purpose for the change was to avoid teaching about using God's provision at the same time as the process of developing a budget for the new year. If both budget and stewardship concerns were presented together, there could be confusion about whether the Board of Stewardship is engaged in stewardship or fund raising.

The difference between a stewardship program and a fund raising program is one of emphasis. Fund raising focuses on the needs of the institution that is getting the money. True stewardship programs in a church focus on the needs of the members. It should discuss much more than material wealth. We need to be reminded of the importance of being a good manager of all of God's gifts.

We will be using a study called *Priorities*. In business, committees and projects often have purpose statements. Churches have mission statements. Properly used, these statements keep all activity focused on its purpose. Does your life have purpose? Or are you controlled by circumstance? During the next few weeks, you will be challenged to write a purpose statement for yourself, to decide what is really important.

When we realize that the short time that we live on earth makes a difference in how we spend eternity, the importance of keeping our focus on eternal matters becomes evident. Your purpose statement will help you to be a more effective Christian by identifying your priorities and guiding your actions. The activities that you undertake will also be affected by your spiritual gifts, talents, and the roles in which God has placed you. By February 1, 2009, you will also be asked to decide on some of the activities that you will undertake in the next year. Much of our study of this process will take place during Sunday school to . The adults will be led by _____, and the youth by _____. There will also be a few more letters to keep you informed about this program.

I pray that each of you will find this beginning of a new year to be a good time to reflect upon all that God has done and to decide on an appropriate response to His blessings.

In Christ's name,

Chairman, Board of Stewardship Life

2. - Importance of eternal treasure – January 12, 2009

Dear (name):

Rewards. Consequences. These are the results of our actions. Some happen immediately. When we eat ice cream, it immediately provides a pleasant taste in our mouths. Some take longer. The overeating of ice cream may increase our susceptibility to a heart attack years in the future. Which is more important, today's pleasant taste or our future health? One important consideration is the duration of the reward or consequence.

Therefore, the thought process used to choose actions should give greater weight to eternal rewards and consequences than to the results we get in our lifetime. In Matthew 6:19-20, Jesus calls us to store treasures in heaven, not on earth, because those stored in heaven last longer. Focusing on the eternal is difficult when we see temporal rewards dangling in front of us. Many of us live according to the philosophy found on the bumper sticker, "He who dies with the most toys, wins."

We need to take time away from the pressures of everyday life to determine what is really important. That is the reason for developing a purpose statement for our lives. Such a statement will be a filter that helps us choose actions that match our beliefs. A Christian's purpose should connect his eternal rewards with his temporal actions. This is such an important concern that the *Westminster Catechism* (used by Presbyterians) has as its first question, "What is the chief end [purpose] of man?"

The Board of Stewardship and I are asking each member of Sample Church to set aside time **this week** to identify a short purpose statement as a guide for life. The Bible gives many instructions relating to activities in which we should participate. These are important, but at this stage, let us first concentrate on the big picture, the main principles. For example, review: Romans 8:29 about becoming Christ-like; Matthew 28:19 about making disciples; Matthew 6:33 about putting God first; and Matthew 22:36-40 about loving God and each other.

Your purpose statement should just be one sentence, or maybe two, that expresses in your own words what is most important in your life. Let me emphasize that the time set aside for writing a purpose statement should include both Bible study and prayer. Let our Lord guide you.

Please be in Sunday school this coming Sunday at _____ as we look at the process of determining what good works God has prepared for us to do as we carry out our life's purpose. See you Sunday.

In Christ's name,

Pastor

P.S. - If you have difficulty writing your purpose statement, or you don't get it done, be sure to be present on Sunday anyway!

3. - Distribute the commitment forms – January 19, 2009

This letter should have a commitment form enclosed with it.

Dear (name):

It has been exciting to see the results of my request last week for members of Lord of Life to think about their purpose. Many are coming up with succinct expressions of the essence of being a follower of Jesus Christ.

This week, we are turning to the planning of specific activities to carry out God's purpose for our lives. Note that it is important to have the purpose understood first. We are far more effective if our purpose determines our goals and activities.

Enclosed is the commitment form that we are using during the current stewardship emphasis. We hope that consideration of the areas covered on this form will help you understand that your purpose should affect your activities every day. Note that you should have already found your answer to the first section, which asks that you write out your life's purpose.

Yesterday, the Sunday school class concentrated on discovering God's specific plan for you. Many of the items listed on this form are activities for all Christians, but there are blanks for the activities that you have found to be especially for you. Examine your spiritual gifts, talents, equipping, personal history, roles, temperament, and calling in the process of letting God lead you into the ministries where He wants you to fulfill your purpose.

The importance of each of the activities listed will be studied in Sunday school this coming Sunday. *Please bring the form with you* as it provides an outline of the class and you may want to fill in the blanks as we study each type of activity. I encourage each of you to attend to get help in your decision making process.

See you Sunday!

In Christ's name,

Pastor

Enc.

4. - Report on the leadership commitments – January 26, 2009

This letter should include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for any out of town addresses.

Dear (name):

During the past few weeks, the church has been focusing on the purpose for our lives. It has been exciting to understand that God has a plan for our lives, and this plan is better than anything we could conceive of. It is also gratifying to find that the almighty God, Creator of the universe wants to use us. That gives us purpose.

This coming Sunday, we will have the opportunity to express our commitment to specific activities that God says are important in our lives everyday. The commitment form was distributed last week. I want to encourage each of you to take time **this week** to fill out this form with God's guidance.

Some of our church leaders have already submitted their commitment forms. These include members of the Board of Stewardship, Board of Elders, and the _____. These people expressed the following commitments:

___ percent have resolved to being positive witnesses for Jesus Christ.

___ percent have committed to telling others about God's gift of salvation, including the naming of ___ specific people.

___ percent have committed to being in a worship service weekly.

___ percent have committed to being part of a regular group Bible study.

___ percent have committed to having personal or family devotions and prayer daily.

___ percent have committed to bringing the full tithe to the Lord.

___ percent have committed to offerings totaling \$_____ plus an average commitment of ___% of their income.

___ percent have committed to being involved in some ministry with _____ percent indicating they will begin work in at least one new ministry.

On behalf of these leaders, I ask you to join us in responding to God's gifts of salvation, life, and material provision by deciding to live according to His direction. Again, please remember to bring your commitment form to the church this coming Sunday.

In Christ's name,

President

5. - Survey those not making a commitment – February 10, 2009

This is to be sent to all persons who did not turn in a commitment sheet.

Dear (name):

This is a survey of people who did not turn in a commitment form in the most recent stewardship emphasis. The Board of Stewardship Life would like to know why no response was received from some of the members of the congregation so that we can better serve the members in future education about living Christianly.

Did you attend any of the Sunday School lessons? Yes No

If yes, please circle the dates attended:

January 11, 2009 January 18, 2009 January 25, 2009 February 1, 2009

If yes, was the material helpful in determining your priorities for your life? Yes No

Did you attend a home Bible study session on priorities? Yes No

If yes, was the material helpful in determining your priorities for your life? Yes No

Did the letters help you understand the goals and procedures in this program? Yes No

Why did you not turn in a commitment form? (Circle all that apply.)

I forgot.

I am uncomfortable with long-term commitments.

I feel my goals should be kept personal and private.

I have been absent and could not deliver the form.

Other (Please explain)

Please provide any other thoughts or suggestions that you might have about this program or other programs of the Board of Stewardship on the back of this form. We want to know how we can best be of service to the members Sample Church.

Please return this survey in the enclosed, stamped envelope. (It is not too late to turn in a commitment form.).

Thank you for your help in this matter.

In Christ's name,
Board of Stewardship

6. - Express thanks and encouragement – February 13, 2009

This letter is sent to all who turned in a commitment form. The commitment form is returned after a copy has been made for the church's records. Also, the purpose statements are typed, laminated, and included with this letter.

Dear (name):

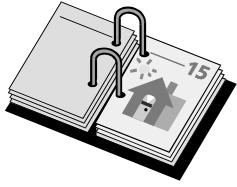
Thank you for your expression of commitment to God's plan for your life! We are confident that the Lord will bless this step of faith you have taken, and that He will grant you the resources to keep your commitment.

As you bring your daily walk into line with the eternal priorities found in the Bible, grace and peace will grow -- not only in your individual and family life, but also in the life of our church. For this reason we are excited about this time of rededication.

Enclosed is your commitment form. (A copy has been placed in the church records.) We encourage you to display this in a prominent place (such as the refrigerator door) where you will see it several times each day. This will remind you to keep the important things in your mind all day long. We have also supplied a copy of your purpose statement. We suggest that you tape it to the bathroom mirror so that you see it first thing in the morning. (It has been laminated so that it will be waterproof!)

In Christ's name,

Chairman, Board of Stewardship Life



Priorities

Four Sunday School Lessons

Speaker's Notes

There are four Sunday School lessons intended to be presented to all high school and adult members of the church. It is recommended that the adults and high school classes meet separately.

The text presented here is written for the adult class. Living the Abundant Life Ministry provides a separate document for high school age classes to any church that wishes to use it.

In this curriculum, the words printed in italics are intended to indicate desired responses from the class members. They include most Scripture, which the instructor can ask members of the class to read, and answers to questions about the Scriptures. Questions have answers given to help the instructor understand the point that the lesson is trying to make. They do not need to be read if the class gives a similar answer.

If the instructor has the class read the Scripture, get a volunteer for each passage when a section is begun so that someone is ready to read when the time comes. Also, if the instructor gets behind, the class may be sped up by the instructor reading the Scripture.

1. - God's purposes for all Christians - January 11, 2009

I. Introduction

What is the meaning of life? Or more specifically, what is the meaning of my life? Or your life? Many people are trying to sell answers to this question. You hear buzzwords like, "self-actualization," "self-renewal," or "self-authentication" to describe the programs offering to help us find meaning for our lives. Others turn to cults, astrology, a belief in reincarnation, a belief in extraterrestrials, or a faith that they will be remembered, all trying to find meaning for their existence. These people are really seeking God — they just do not know what they are looking for.

II. There are four ways to find your purpose in life.¹

All people live out a purpose. They may or may not be aware of it at the time. It may be good or bad. There are four ways to find your purpose in life.

1. **Deduction** - This applies to those who do not know their purpose. These are the people that get to an identity crisis in life and ask, "What is my life adding up to?" They look at what they have done, their activities, and try to deduce the purpose behind them. We might call this a *postmortem purpose*. The majority of people obtain their purpose in this manner. Activities without objectives tend to be rendered useless and unfulfilling due to their inconsistency. These people may have undertaken some of their activities with an objective in mind. But when objectives have been accomplished, they provide only a temporary satisfaction in the quest for meaning. A person will move on to the next objective. Is he still going in the same direction, or is he reversing his course? Without a known purpose in life, objectives can also be inconsistent.
2. **Association** - There are numerous organizations which promise that joining will give meaning or purpose to a life. Almost every organization -- companies, civic clubs, political organizations, churches, etc. -- exist for some purpose. Many people simply follow the purpose of one or more organizations as their reason for living. This association results in an *adopted purpose*. This is much better than a postmortem purpose in that some decision went into choosing the organization to associate with. However, most people are associated with a variety of organizations. If they allow themselves to adopt a variety of purposes, they can be as inconsistent as a person who knows no purpose. Note that a major problem with cults is a hidden or disguised purpose, so that those who join may have adopted a purpose with which they actually disagree.
3. **Emulation** - A third group of people seek to pattern their life after a "hero." You see this in fads in hair styles and fashion, as well as in children mimicking their parents. Because this happens, it is apparent that the availability of good role models is important. The result of emulation is a *vicarious purpose*. This method of finding a purpose can be good or bad depending on the "hero" that is chosen, but it is never the best that is available to an **individual**.
4. **Personalization** - A small minority of people will develop a personal conviction about their purpose in life. I want you to be a part of this minority. Let us work to find a Godly purpose for each of our lives -- something that we can claim as our

¹ *Establishing Your Purpose* (Knoxville, TN: Vision Foundation, Inc., 1993) p. 15

own gift from God. This will give us a filter that we may use to judge activities, associations, and heroes to see if they fit our purpose, rather than being carried along by others. This greatly increases our consistency, and therefore our effectiveness. It has been said, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing."

III. *The right source*

However, this consistency leading to effectiveness can be a two-edged sword. We would not want to be effective in doing evil. When we choose an individual purpose, we want it to be a good purpose. That is not achieved by any particular technique, but by going to the right source - our holy, righteous and all-knowing God.

In Isaiah 55:8-9, God tells us, "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways ... As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*" How does this passage help us understand the process of developing a purpose statement? *God's way is better than anything we can conceive of. Turn to Him to get the best answer to your question of purpose, and do not settle for less.*

One of the statements from God's Word that should guide us in preparing a purpose statement is Matthew 6:19-20 "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.*" What does this passage tell us to do in our life? *This tells us to emphasize eternal matters.* What does the word treasure mean (it is used twice)? *Earthly treasure is all our material wealth. We do not really know exactly what heavenly treasure means.* Doesn't the visibility of earthly wealth make it easier to focus on than heavenly wealth? God does not send us a monthly statement.

Life has eternal rewards and consequences. These are most important due to the infinite amount of time that we will live with them. And yet we say that our purpose is to guide us every day! Purpose links the eternal with the temporal aspects of life.

IV. *Major principles of living²*

Let us look at some of the big issues that God includes in His word as a guide for developing a short purpose statement. These are not intended to give us details on our activities, but to give us major principles of living.

1. We are to know God and His ways.

*This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: **that he understands and knows Me**, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD. -Jeremiah 9:23-24*

What is the key idea in this verse? *It is good to understand and know God.* This verse continues to tell us something about God. What does it say about who He

² *Establishing Your Purpose* (Knoxville, TN: Vision Foundation, Inc., 1993) p. 19

is? *He is the One who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness. He delights in these.*

He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: -Psalm 103:7 What is the difference between knowing “ways” and “deeds.”

These two passages emphasize the importance of a personal relationship with God. Too often, we read parts of the Bible as just a history book. When you are reading something that sounds like history, ask yourself, “Why did God do this?” or “What is God teaching His people through this incident?” Let the Holy Spirit introduce you to God as a Person, not an impersonal “It”. Learn about His nature, not just His activities. Like Moses, understand why He did it, not just what He did.

2. We are to become Christ-like.

*For those God foreknew he also predestined to **be conformed to the likeness of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. -Romans 8:29*

What should we realize from this verse about God's intentions for us? *He intends to change you.* How many of us are exactly like Christ now? *None.* God is conforming us to Christ-likeness. That means He is changing us. This can be scary.

In Isaiah 64:8, and in several other places, the illustration is used that speaks of God as a potter and us as the clay. In order for the potter to work, the clay must remain wet. If the clay becomes dry, it gets brittle so that it just breaks as the potter attempts to work it. In that condition, it is useless. Do not be brittle. Be available and willing to mature, to be molded, into whatever God wants you to be.

3. We are to become involved in God's program.

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." — Matthew 22:36-40 What does this passage say about how we get involved in what God wants us to do? *With all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. We can't go into God's program in a half hearted way.*

Does anyone know what Old Testament Scripture Jesus is quoting as the greatest commandment? *Deuteronomy 6:5.* Did you notice what he added? *“Love the Lord with your mind.”* The Hebrew person would have probably understood that the Deuteronomy passage included the mind, but Jesus made it explicit for the Greek culture in which He lived. Too often today, I believe that we are persuaded by the world that intellect is incompatible with faith. Let me emphasize that Jesus is telling us to get our whole selves — including our mind — involved in living according to His purpose.

What does this passage tell us is of primary importance in God's plan? *Love — for God and other humans. Relationships — the Bible is a book about relationships.*

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. — Colossians 1:28-29 What is our goal as expressed in these scriptures? *To present everyone perfect in Christ.* Can we do this without being involved in God's program? *No. Why? We need His energy and wisdom.*

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. — Matthew 6:33 What does this tell us about the priority to be given to God's program? *It should be our top priority, and if we put it first, He will take care of the other priorities.*

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." — Matthew 28:19-20 This is the so-called "Great Commission" found in the last two verses of the book of Matthew. What does this tell us about our involvement in God's program? ***The only verb in the Greek is "make."*** *We need to be available to go where God wants us. Focus on others. He will be with us.*

Let's summarize what we just covered. The main ideas that should be incorporated into our purpose are: 1) We are to know God and His ways; 2) We are to become Christ-like; and 3) We are to become involved in God's program. These ideas teach us some of the basics of God's intentions for us. They do not give many specifics. We will study that in a couple of weeks.

One of the main points to get from these passages is that these instructions are directed to everyone, not just pastors, not just those who are leaders in the church, but to all Christians.

Also, from these general statements, notice the importance of **relationships**, not just **activities**. This includes both the relationship with God involving loving and seeking, as well as the relationships with our fellow men characterized by reaching, teaching, and loving all people.

V. Assignment

Now for your homework assignment. I ask you to take time in the coming week to write out a purpose statement for yourself. It should be short -- one or two sentences -- and two may be stretching it. And do not make it like one of Paul's sentences that go on and on. Let it be something that you can remember so that it can guide you wherever you are. It is to be almost a slogan. Some examples to give you ideas are the following:

My purpose is to go to heaven and take as many people as possible with me.

My purpose is to know God and make Him known.

My purpose is to glorify God and enjoy His presence forever.

My purpose is to glorify God as I participate with Him in the process of becoming prepared for eternity in heaven.

My purpose is to glorify and edify Christ in all I do.

Jesus had a purpose statement also. Luke 19:10 - *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.* Did he follow this purpose statement? Yes. Can anyone think of occasions where this purpose was clearly in control? When other paths seemed much easier?

1. Satan's temptations after Jesus had fasted for forty days. "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." — a temptation to use His power as God for selfish purposes, not to seek and save the lost.
2. Think of Jesus' response when Peter rebuked Jesus, saying Jesus should not be killed. Matthew 16:23 "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."
3. A concentration on His purpose is the only way I can conceive of that would keep Jesus on the cross.

Do any of you already have purpose statements that you live by? If so, would you be willing to share them with the class as additional examples?

This purpose statement should be broad enough to apply to your entire life, not just the next year, or month, or time period when you have a certain role. The detailed activities that you undertake in carrying out your purpose may change quite regularly, particularly as roles change. For example, if you are parents, much of your life is consumed by activities related to raising Godly children. While those activities are very important, I am looking for something bigger! Your purpose statement should direct the raising of children, but it should also give you something to do when the kids leave home. Having a continuing purpose will help you avoid a "mid-life crisis" when the nest becomes empty.

Now, I am not saying that you will never change your purpose statement. As you grow and mature, you may decide that you want to add to or change your purpose. That is fine, but what you write now should reflect the best that you can dream of for your entire life.

I hope that each of us will find this time listening to our Lord about His purpose for our lives to be fruitful. Let God lead you down the path He has prepared for you. Listen to what he says, *"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."* -Jeremiah 29:11 This verse can be a great comfort. When we are following God's ways, and they are different than what we think we ought to be doing, remember that God plans to prosper you, to provide the very best for you. He is a caring God that loves you so much that He sent His Son to die for you. Trust that this is good -- it may not feel good, but it is good.

2. - Finding God's specific purposes for me³ - January 18, 2009

In the last week, each of you was asked to decide what your purpose is in life. What are some of the purpose statements that you have come up with?

These purpose statements tend to be somewhat universal, and that is how they should be. We also need to recognize that the specific work that we do for God should be specific to each of us. In other words, God has different ministries for different people. This lesson examines the types of evidence that a Christian will want to study in order to gain an understanding of the specific activities that God would want him or her involved in.

There is a handout for you to use as we go through this lesson. It gives you a place to record the evidence in each area that we will be discussing.

Spiritual gifts

Spiritual gifts are the special drives and abilities given by the Holy Spirit to achieve God's supernatural purpose. They are different from other abilities that one may have in that Spiritual gifts are difficult to use for any purpose other than to glorify God and edify His church.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. -1 Corinthians 12:4-7 This passage talks about there being different gifts for different kinds of service, but all gifts are to be used for the common good. 1 Peter 4:10 is more specific. It says. "*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*" In other words, since we should use our gifts in service, knowing what gifts we have will help us to know the types of ministry that we should each be involved in.

How do we know what gifts the Spirit has given to us? Some theologians suggest a five step process, known as the five E's, for discovering our gifts. The five E's are the following:

1. Explore - Learn about the gifts. See the three lists of gifts in the Bible — Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:11-12. Which gifts sound like you? What do you like to do? There are spiritual gift discovery tools available to help us in this first step, exploring. Spiritual gift courses are given periodically in some churches.
2. Experiment - Try ministries in a variety of areas, ones that would use different gifts. See which ones seem right for you.
3. Enjoy - There should be a feeling of satisfaction, a feeling that you are in the right place, when you are using your gifts. The jobs may be challenging, but they should not be burdensome. Remember that Jesus told us that His yoke is easy. Matthew 11:30

³ *Establishing Your Purpose* (Knoxville, TN: Vision Foundation, Inc., 1993) p. 28

4. Expect results - If you are doing what God wants you to do, He will enable you to do the work. With Him enabling us, we often see progress. We see that God is using us to accomplish His goals.
5. Encouragement - A sign that you are in the right place is the encouragement that you receive from others. This also suggests that we should verbalize it when we notice someone that is using his or her spiritual gifts.

Talents

In addition to spiritual gifts given only to Christians by the Holy Spirit, God has made each person different. We all have strong points and weaknesses. Each one of us has some areas where we are more capable than in other areas. These are called talents. Often, these talents can easily be used for our own purpose as opposed to God's purpose. However, since we as Christians belong to God and were created to do good works, we should use our talents to do God's will. *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* -Ephesians 2:10

Examine what you are good at, whether it be music, math, or catching footballs, and devise ways to use your abilities to further God's purpose in your life.

Equipping

Who is now doing a job for which they had no training, that they knew how to do when they were born? (Parenting?) Talent is not the only source of ability. Some capabilities are developed through education or practice. Even if you have the spiritual gift of music and great musical talent, you would probably not be able to glorify God playing bagpipes if you had not been educated on how they are played and had spent some time practicing.

Work on developing the talents that God has given you. The world's way is to have you concentrate on eliminating weaknesses, especially in the business environment. That is not necessarily completely wrong, but we should concentrate on being the best we can be at what God gifted us to do.

For God's work, equipping should always include knowing God and His ways. This involves Bible study and prayer.

Write down on your worksheet a summary of the training that you have received.

Personal history

Are there trials and tribulations that you have gone through? The death of a child? A severe illness? Career change? Reeducation? Those experiences have given you insight into how God is present in those times. Use this insight to help others in the same situation.

God says, "I got you from A to B. It was rocky, but I got you there. Now here is someone at A."

*Ask for **specifics** on the worksheet. (Not to be turned in.)*

These specifics are important. I know one person that calls them little gems in his pocket! When he runs into a troubling situation and puts his hands in his pockets while thinking about the trouble, he finds the gems and remembers, "God was with

me in this situation. Another situation was somewhat like this one, and God got me through it. Oh, and that situation was much worse than this present one, and it turned out OK!"

How do you remember incidents? Hear it; see it; write it; tell it.

Note to instructor: Mention Heart-to-Heart Evangelism course.⁴

Roles

Some of an individual's activities will be determined by the roles that they have been given by God. Some of the roles mentioned in the Bible are:

† Husband: *Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.*
-Colossians 3:19

*Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, **so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*** -1 Peter 3:7 This idea of the wife being weaker is not popular today, but remember that God's ways are different and better than what seems right to man. The man is considered strong because he is the spiritual head of the household — he is responsible to God for the whole family. Example, after the eating of the apple in the Garden of Eden, who did God talk to? Typically others in the family are happy for the husband and father to have this job.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her -Ephesians 5:25. How did Christ love the church?

1. More than the church loved Him.
2. Met the church's needs more than the church met His.
3. Christ gave everything for the church, including His life.
4. He is the initiator.
5. He is the provider.

† Wife: *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.* - Ephesians 5:22 Men, do not gloat on this one. Remember that the Lord came as a servant. Imitate Him to make it easier for your wives to follow this direction. However, women are not to make their respect of their husbands conditional. Do not think, "I will respect my husband when he gets a job; gets a promotion; spends more time with the kids; etc." This verse has no provision for not respecting husbands that are not worthy, which is good because none of us men are really worthy to be respected "as the Lord."

*For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were **submissive** to their own husbands, like Sarah, who **obeyed** Abraham and called him her **master**. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.* -1 Peter 3:5-6

⁴ Rev. Stephen A. Wagner, *Heart-to-Heart: Sharing Christ with a Friend* (Corunna, Indiana: Church Growth Center

- ✠ Parent^s: *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.* -Ephesians 6:4

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. Proverbs 22:6 This one is often a comfort to parents of teenagers and young adults. Note that it does not say they will follow the right ways when they are young.

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:1-2,4-9

This well-known passage emphasizes the importance of the teaching which occurs in the home. The Word of God is to have a central place in our lives, not just in church on Sunday. But many parents feel they are not trained to be teachers. Psalm 112:1-2 has the answer — *Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands. His children will be mighty in the land.* This verse alludes to what modern psychology calls "role modeling." Let your child see you trusting and obeying God. Any time you spend in getting your own daily behavior to line up with your ideals will be well-spent; for children will imitate your *walk* more than your *talk*. As James Dobson noted, "Excessively materialistic parents can inflict enormous spiritual damage on their sons and daughters. If they see that we care more about things than people, if they perceive that we have sought to buy their love as a guilt reducer, if they recognize the hollowness of our Christianity when it is accompanied by stinginess with God, the result is often cynicism and rejection. And more important, when they observe Dad working 15 hours a day to capture ever more of this world's goods, they know where his treasure is. *Seeing is believing.*"⁶

One of the major tasks for those in the role of parent is to teach children to make right decisions because the "rightness" is important, not merely to avoid punishment. Children need lots of practice in this area, but some never get any. Parents should not expect children to make right decisions every time as they start making their own decisions about right and wrong. They will probably be wrong on two out of their first three decisions, so parents need to be sure those first three decisions are on minor issues -- not sex, drugs, or suicide. 1 Corinthians 13:11 *When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a*

⁵ Steve and Nita Dossin, *Living the Abundant Life Seminar*, 1992.

⁶ Dr. James Dobson, *Focus on the Family Bulletin*, March, 1992.

child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. Help your children to understand that you are trying to help them "put away childish things." Tell them that you do not want them at home forever, but you are trying to teach them how to find the **right way** when you are no longer there to guide them.

In the post-Christian society we live in today, this can be extremely difficult. There are so many influences that will try to direct kids along other paths, including entertainment, cults, and peer pressure. And there is also the public education system. How can you teach children the concept of "right" and "wrong" when most educational theorists are attempting to make public schools "values-neutral"? . . . especially when it appears that they are really becoming hostile to the existence of *any* values? With the Humanist world view being pushed by so many leaders in education, many believe that parents must consider alternatives to public education in setting their priorities. Children are simply too important to turn over to the state. These problems are serious enough to warrant adjusting your priorities to include home school for your children or buying education from schools having the same values that you do.

- ✠ *Child: Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise--"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."* -Ephesians 6:1-3 How long are we children of our parents? As long as we live. The English is funny on this. Even when we are not children, we are our parents' children and we should always honor our parents. That does not mean the relationship does not change as children get older. Parents should treat adult children as adults and recognize that they, as parents, have little authority left when the children have left the house, but children should still respect them. *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."* -Mark 10:7-9
- ✠ *Members of families in general: If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.* 1 Timothy 5:8 This verse shows that it is important to God that we care for our families.
- ✠ *Employee: Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.* -Ephesians 6:5-8
- ✠ *Employer or supervisor: And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.* -Ephesians 6:9

Remember that your employees are to serve the same master you do. They should be allowed to recognize God as their top priority. Do not ask them to work in a way that interferes with their relationships with God and family. Treat them fairly. The Bible is particularly harsh on any employer who withholds an

employee's pay. *Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor.* -Jeremiah 22:13

Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. -James 5:4

- † Widows and widowers: *The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.* -1 Timothy 5:5-6

Temperament

What kind of personality do you have? Some personality types are better suited for many activities than are others. For example, a melancholy individual may make a poor evangelist. A choleric individual will not function well on a team requiring members to work together for long periods.

Note to instructor: Temperament testing is available.

Calling

Do you feel that God has called you to a specific ministry? If so, that ministry should certainly be considered as one of the activities that you must give priority in your planning. Do not think that this applies only to an occupation. Some have said that calling provides the link between worship and discipleship. It may guide you in whatever activity you undertake for the Lord.

Many of you have written some of your gifts, talents, etc. on the worksheet. Please continue to think about the direction provided by God during this week. You may think of more things to write down in the various categories. As you review this evidence, consider the last question on the form. "What activities and ministries should I be involved in to best use the capabilities provided by God?"

Please be back here next week as we plan our activities to best accomplish the purpose statement that God has helped us write. We will be using the evidence gathered on this worksheet today, so you may want to bring it back next Sunday.

3. - Activities to support God's purposes - January 25, 2009

The worksheet for today's lesson is the commitment form for this stewardship emphasis time, which you should have received in the mail and brought with you. Does anyone here today need a copy of the form?

Let us begin by looking at Ephesians 2:8-10 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Because we are justified by the blood of Jesus Christ, we should respond with an eagerness to do what God would have us to do. This is what we call sanctification, being set apart for God's purposes. Let's look at some of the activities that should be given priority in our lives. Some of these are categories of activities where the examination done last week will lead to specifics to be included in each person's life. However, every category is important, so every Christian should have at least one regular activity in each of these areas:

Be a witness

The first two types of activities listed relate to a very important part of being involved in God's program, that of making others aware of the free gift God has made available to all who believe in Jesus as their Savior.

"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD. -Isaiah 43:10

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." -Acts 1:8

We are not to leave our Christianity behind when we leave the church. We are to demonstrate that we have something that nonchristians do not have. St. Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the Gospel all the time. If necessary, use words."

Realize that we are all witnesses. The question is really, "What kind of witness are we?" Our lives are witnesses of what we really believe, our world view. Live in a way that others will notice that your beliefs are different from those of the world. 1 Peter 3:15 says, *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.* Give those around you reason to ask.

Evangelism

In addition to being a witness for Christ in the way we live, all Christians are called to the specific act of telling others about God and His gift of salvation.

Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.

Proclaim among the nations what he has done. -Psalm 9:11

Therefore I will praise you among the nations, O LORD; -Psalm 18:49

They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

In that day you will say: "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world."

"I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. -Luke 12:8-9

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord. -2 Timothy 1:8

Worship

We emphasized two weeks ago that a Godly purpose involves relationships, the most important of which is the relationship with our Heavenly Father. Let us begin with the activity of maintaining our relationship with God. The elements of a worship service (Praise, Prayer, Word, and Sacrament) are for this purpose.

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; -Psalm 95:6

Jesus said to him, "... 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" -Matthew 4:10

"Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the LORD. -Leviticus 19:30

The idea of keeping a true Sabbath is now unpopular even among Christians, but it is important for man's well being. Mark 2:27 (Jesus) *said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.* This is a gift from God that we do not seem willing to accept. The three R's for this day are rest, reverence, and recreation.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 *"Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work. . .*

Naturally, we do not want to be legalistic about this, but it is important to realize that we human beings were created with a need for a God-centered change of pace every seven days. Let's include it in our time priorities.

Taking time for worship should be a joy, not a burden.

I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." -Psalm 122:1

Your commitment form asks that you commit to being involved in one worship service every week. It is understood that not all of these will necessarily be at your home church. When you travel, find a church for your weekly worship. If you must stay home due to illness, ask family and friends to help you with a worship service in your home or get a copy of the tape of the church service you missed.

Bible study

In addition to gathering for worship, Christians should also gather with each other to teach and encourage one another. Group Bible study includes Sunday school, small group meetings, and many other regular groups. These should be groups that are small enough and consistent enough for relationships to develop among the participants. The encouragement and accountability are almost as important as what is learned from the study itself.

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' **teaching** and to the **fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. -Acts 2:42*

*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us **encourage** one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. -Hebrews 10:25*

Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise. Proverbs 19:20

Prayer/personal devotions

Each Christian should have some daily personal time with the Lord: a time for prayer and getting God's insight on the concerns of everyday life. This helps you to keep focused on the Lord. Let us consider some of what the Bible says about prayer:

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. -Ephesians 6:18

Pray continually; -1 Thessalonians 5:17

But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. -Jude 20

Prayer is a two way conversation. We talk "with" God, not just "to" Him. I believe that prayer should be much more than just presenting a grocery list of requests to God.

Psalm 16:7 I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.

John 8:47 He who belongs to God hears what God says.

*John 16:13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into **all** truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.*

How do we hear from the Lord? Stop to listen while praying. Just take some time in your personal prayers to be silent. Psalm 46:10 *"Be still, and know that I am God."* I wonder if the Psalmist knew how difficult that would be in the world today, where the lights never all go out and there are radios and TV's to provide constant noise.

We will now turn to the other part of daily devotions. There should be some time studying God's Word.

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the

LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. -Psalm 1:1-3

This passage speaks of the Law, which has a bit of a negative connotation, but the giving of the Law was a loving act. Look at the situation when it was given. Israel has just been brought out of 400 years of slavery. These people did not know how to govern themselves, relate to one another or relate to their God! The law was not given by a God who just wanted to watch His people jump through hoops. It is a guide given by the God who IS love on how to live so that your life goes well for you and prospers others. Other passages about God's Word are:

Psalm 119:105 *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.* Sometimes it would seem better to have halogen headlights to see way down the road, but that is not what God gives us. He shows us what we need to know when we need it.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Can we afford to ignore God's Book? Think of buying a new car. In the glove compartment, you will find an owner's manual. It is written by the people that designed the car to help you take the best possible care of the car. They know how to do that since they know everything there is to know about the car. "When do you change the oil?", "What kind of gas do you use?", and so on. What if you just throw this manual away and do things your own way? Say you decide to put water in the gas tank to save money? Do you have cause to get upset with the manufacturer when it does not run very well? Well, the Bible is the same way. It is written by our Maker, who also made the whole earth. Do not expect things to go well in our lives, if we do not do what the Book says do. Think of the Bible as our owner's manual.

Tithe⁷

One of the most important topics in the Bible is material wealth. There are more verses about this subject than any other in the Bible. We must always recognize that all we have belongs to God, and that we are managing it for Him. One of the directions that we get from the owner is that one-tenth of our income, called the tithe, is to be returned to Him.

Malachi 3:8-12 says, *"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse--the whole nation of you--because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.*

⁷ Steve and Nita Dossin, *Living the Abundant Life Seminar*, 1992.

The first question that may come to mind is "This is Old Testament; Isn't this just part of the Jewish ceremonial law that we no longer need to follow?" The answer is an emphatic "NO". It was included in those procedures, but the first and second recorded tithes are before the Moses and it was sanctioned by both Jesus and Paul.

Let's think of this another way. Suppose that a faithful Jew converts to Christianity. He has been tithing all his life because that was part of his law. The first Sunday he comes to church, he brings money to the church. Would you expect him to bring less than the tithe now that he understands more about what God has done for him? I doubt it. I would think that he would want to bring all the ceremonial amounts (which is really much more than the tithe) plus even more due to the discovery of God's grace and sacrifice for him.

Now let's turn to what Malachi actually said - withholding the tithe is robbing God. Isn't "robbing" a bit strong? Consider the following example. You invest \$10,000 in another person's business under the condition that you are to receive 10% of the profits. During the first year, that person's business has made \$1,000 profit. The businessman comes to you and thanks you for your help, praises you for supplying the money to start the business, and listens to instructions based upon your book. However, when you ask for your share of the profits, he reaches into his pocket and gives you some left over spare change. Wouldn't you feel robbed? Even worse, what if he then asked you to invest more in his company? Is that not how we treat God when we do not tithe? We come and praise God, thank Him for His provision, and hear His Word preached, but we do not do what He told us to do with His possessions. Yet we pray for new jobs, new cars, more money, etc.

Amazingly, our God still says come to Him, even though we have robbed Him. Is that how you would treat someone who had robbed you, and continues to rob you? Due to the sacrifice of Jesus, we are forgiven of all our sins, including stealing from God, and we are still welcome in heaven when we leave this earth. *Tithing is not required for salvation.*

Nevertheless, in response to this grace, we should repent and count on God's help in following His commands. There is a reason why the Ten Commandments are not called the ten suggestions. In the same way that you would ask a murderer to stop killing, I humbly and earnestly encourage those who are not tithing to stop stealing.

In addition to the tithe being God's and us having a trust to do what he says with it, are there other reasons to tithe?

1. Honor the Lord, recognizing His ownership of your lives: Proverbs 3:9 *Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops.*
2. It is part of the learning process. Deuteronomy 14:22 ff. *Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. . . so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always.*
3. It is evidence of your love for God: 2 Corinthians 8:7-8 . . . *see that you also excel in this grace of giving. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love . . .*

4. It is good business. See the promises in the Malachi passage that we just read. Proverbs 3:9-10 *Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.* Now do not misunderstand this point. It is not that I am advocating a purely selfish reason for being obedient. Do not tithe just to receive more; God looks at your heart. Be obedient to please the God you love and to show gratitude for His blessings, and rest in His assurance that you will provide for your needs!
5. I believe that tithing keeps us from coveting money because it keeps our priorities in line. We do not want to get to the point we love money more than God. 1 Timothy 6:9-10 *People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.*
6. It provides for God's work. If every Christian family tithed, the church would be capable of a great deal more ministry than you see today; and we would not see churches turning to loans when they need to expand their facilities. In addition to providing money, it would lead to willing workers, for Jesus said in Matthew 6:21 *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Do not be trapped by attempting to "work your way up to" a tenth of your income. Look at the Bible verse, which says, "Bring the **whole** tithe into the storehouse ..." A partial tithe will not open the "windows of heaven." We would still be guilty of holding back from God, which was what the Israelites were doing in the time of Malachi. "But," you say, "there is no room with my income for contributing 10% right now!" It isn't your income, it is the Lord's, and he says to do it first, so there is room.

Offerings

As we turn to offerings, let's look again at Malachi 3:8: *"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes **and offerings**.* This tells us that offerings are expected by God. Let me remind you that all that we have belongs to God; we are His managers, but in the area of offerings, you may find it more difficult to find God's ways -- what He wants us to do with His material wealth. Here you need to include prayer and consultation with other Christians in your decision making process, because the Bible discusses these areas without giving specifics on the amounts. It does talk about purposes for offerings. Biblical examples include helping the poor and building places of worship.

On the commitment form, please describe the offerings to be given this year. Use either amounts or, preferably, percent of income.

Ministry

To fill in the last section of the commitment form, look at the worksheet from last Sunday. What ministries did you decide to be involved in? Note that we do not necessarily expect all your ministries to be here within this church. Some may be with other ministry organizations. Some will be in the family setting, or in the workplace, depending on your roles. There are also boxes to check to indicate whether the ministries that you and God have chosen are activities that you are already doing or are activities that you have decided to begin as we studied our purpose and priorities.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

Please pray about these commitments this week and bring your completed form back next week to be turned in.

4. - How do I know if I am in God's will? - February 1, 2009

This is the Sunday that we are asked to turn in the commitment form in response to this year's time of emphasis on being good stewards of our lives. Some of you may already have returned the form during early service. Some will turn it in later. In either case, the information will be recorded and the form will be returned to you. It is hoped that you will put this form some place where you will see it every morning. That way, you will start each day with a reminder of what is really important.

The commitment form begins with the purpose for your life. Embed that in your mind so that you can make decisions throughout the day on the basis of that statement. When you are considering an action, ask yourself, "Is this course of action consistent with my purpose for living?" or "Does this action do the best job of accomplishing my purpose in life?" Note that the relationship between every action and your purpose does not have to be direct. We may work at our employment in order to have resources to carry out a ministry that fits our purpose directly.

In the next section of the form, we listed some of the activities involved in carrying out our purpose. Again, this form will be returned to you so that it can serve as a reminder of what you decided was important when you stopped to think about that question. A major reason for ineffective lives is the fact that decisions are often made on the spur of the moment reflecting short term desires, rather than in the context of a well-reasoned set of priorities. Here is a set of priorities that you have worked on for the last few weeks. That is the first step toward accomplishing your purpose. The second step is to use these priorities in making everyday decisions.

If the statement of purpose and activities is going to be used in this manner, we want to be sure it is right for us. We want to know we are following God's plan for our lives since His plans are better than anything we can dream of. Obviously, if we are not doing what scripture instructs us to do, we are outside of His plan. But we need more. There is a lot of leeway in scripture since the Bible is for everyone, but we there are more specifics in God's plan for our individual lives. Let us look at four evidences that we have found God's plan for our lives.⁸

I. Fruit

If you are following God's plan, it should make a difference in the results of your efforts.

Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives. -Titus 3:14 What does "unproductive lives" mean? *In this context, it seems to be referring to those that fail to provide for their material needs.* That is important, but there is much more.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. -2 Peter 1:5-8 This passage uses the

⁸ *Establishing Your Purpose* (Knoxville, TN: Vision Foundation, Inc., 1993) p. 25

same word, "unproductive," but the context is different. Here, it seems to be more concerned with spiritual matters. How are we productive? *We start with the faith provided by the Holy Spirit (not ourselves)*. Note that all of the items in this progression are part of the fruit of the Spirit. I can't wait to be more loving.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. -James 3:13 What is wise and understanding? Is it visible to others? *Only through the actions, the life led.* That is illustrated by President Clinton's response to Mother Teresa's criticism of his administration's position on abortion, "How can one argue with a life so well lived?" What is meant by "deeds done in humility?" *Humble, not to be praised, but in recognition that God provides the power. Do not hold on to human nature that wants to take credit for good deeds. Humility comes from (God's) wisdom.*

In John 15:4-5a, Jesus said, *Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.*

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. -John 15:8 "Fruit" means to do what Jesus did.

So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. -Romans 7:4 This one reminds us that when we talk about being fruitful or productive in this context, the most important results are the eternal ones. One of the first passages mentioned three weeks ago in this study was Matthew 6:19-20 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal." As one person put it, if this world is where your fruit lies, the fruit flies will get it.

II. Focus on people

If our purpose is really God's purpose, it must recognize as important whatever is important to God. So often, people find it easier (in our human nature) to take care of physical things - the favorite golf clubs, that antique car, the church building.

For the LORD'S portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance. In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, -Deuteronomy 32:9-10 What does this mean, to be God's portion? *People are what is most important to God. He does not need material goods. He does not need our good works. He wants people to be in a right relationship with Him.* God is focused on people, and cares for them.

People are of ultimate worth to God. This is especially evident when we think about the price paid for our salvation. There are also numerous passages that emphasize the importance of being focused on people, not on things.

Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my

sheep. -John 21:15-17 Who are Jesus' sheep? *The church, all Christians.* What does it mean to feed them? *Yes, it means to provide them with physical food when that is needed, but more important is the spiritual food -- the Word and the Sacraments.* This exchange between Jesus and Peter is quite interesting for a number of reasons. One is that there are two different words used that are both translated into English as "love" — "agapao" and "phileo." "Phileo" refers for the love between friends, as in Philadelphia, the "city of brotherly love." "Agapao" is an unconditional love, the love God shows to man, the love discussed in Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians. This exchange was repeated three times. The first two times Jesus asked the question, He used "agapao." The last time, He echoed Peter, who used "phileo" every time. Another reason why this incident is interesting is in relation to the previous one-on-one encounter between Jesus and Peter — Good Friday morning when Peter denied He knew Jesus **three** times, one time even with a curse. Jesus was meeting Peter where he was — not chastising. He is focused on people, and the restoration of the relationship, not on task.

So there are two points to this passage — one is the command to take care of the church; the other is a demonstration of how to take care of fellow Christians. We hope that an improved relationship with God is the result of you going through this stewardship emphasis time. Just as in Peter's encounter with Jesus, the purpose of this curriculum is to teach and to challenge each of us to live a life pleasing to God, not to chastise anyone for past shortcomings. I pray that this study has been a time of relationship restoration through repentance and forgiveness.

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. -James 1:27 James is so good at reminding us that while we are saved by faith, not works, actions are an appropriate response to trusting in Jesus Christ for our salvation. What actions are discussed here? *Caring for widows and orphans.* Does keeping oneself from being polluted by the world mean that we must avoid contact with nonchristians? *No, we must meet them where they are to show them the love of God.*

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. -1 John 4:7 What is required to be able to truly love another person? *To know God, one of the basic guidelines in developing our purpose statements.*

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. -1 John 4:11 God's love for us was demonstrated by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. What should our response to this gift of salvation be? *To love one another.*

*And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God **must** also love his brother.* -1 John 4:21 Note the word "must." This is a command. There are no qualifications, we do not just show love to people we think are nice. Remember that people were made in God's image. How can you love God without loving the image of God? Why do we not love some individuals? *Misfocusing - we look at actions rather than the person. It is OK to hate sin, but do not hate the sinner.* How do we love our brother? *Prayer, care, etc.*

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. -1 John 3:17-18 What is the nature of love as expressed by John? It involves action -- meeting the needs of another.

III. Contentment

A God-centered purpose should produce contentment in your life through the awareness that God has provided all that is needed for His wonderful plan.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. -1 Timothy 6:6

The problem with attempting to gain contentment any other way is illustrated in a 1992 Roper poll. It found that people with incomes under \$25,000 said \$54,000 would meet all their wishes, while those making \$100,000 said \$192,000 would be enough. Note that the more we have, the more we want. Material wealth will be addictive if we take our eyes off the Lord. It is also interesting to note that this survey reported a decline in the amount desired amongst the older respondents.⁹ They must have learned that large amounts of money do not buy happiness, as Solomon understood when he wrote in Ecclesiastes 5:10, *Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.*

If we trust that the Lord intends to bless us, then it is logical to assume that what we have is exactly what is best for us. It may not be what we, in our sinful state wish, but it is what the infinitely wise God knows we should have. Therefore, we should be happy with it.

In Philippians 4:11-12, Paul writes, *"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."* Where does this contentment come from?

Luke 3:14 *Then some soldiers asked him (John the Baptist), "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely--**be content with your pay.**"*

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 *Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* Prayer: "This is not exactly where I want to be, but thank you God."

Hebrews 13:5-6 *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "**Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.**" So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"* What a promise! We are to be treated even better than the Son of God. The Father turned His back on Jesus while Jesus was hanging on the cross. This reminds me of the line in a benediction, "May His face shine upon you." Let's talk a moment about that last phrase. What can man do to me? *Steal possessions, kill, hurt, etc.* And yet we are not to worry. We have God!

⁹Wall Street Journal, "The American Dream." New York: Dow Jones & Co., Inc., 7/14/92, p. 1.

The world today makes it difficult to focus on our Lord. Money doesn't just talk, it is screaming at us. The television is constantly calling our attention to "wonderful" things we do not have, through advertising and shows like "The Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous." People seem to find more ways to flaunt wealth, whether they have it or not. Work on **not** listening to the screams; they will steal your contentment away. The world wants to take what God has given to us.

Let me tell you about "one of the best-loved and most respected individuals in a community. It seems he never had to work as hard as others. But he always had enough. He always seemed to have time to go fishing or to sit on the porch and 'just talk.' But somehow the work always got done. He stood in stark contrast to some of his neighbors, who were always working, but never seemed to have time for relaxation or pleasure. He always had time for a sympathetic ear and for effective help in time of trouble. What was his secret? . . . 'Easy,' he said. 'I have everything I want - because I know what to want!'"¹⁰

IV. Dependence on God

The pursuit of a Godly purpose should increase our awareness of our dependence on God. By ourselves, we cannot do God's will. Even the Apostle Paul said in Romans 7:18 "*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*" Turn to God for help. It is by His power, **and only by His power**, that we can carry out His commands. There are numerous promises of His help in the Bible:

*I can do **everything** through him who gives me strength.* -Philippians 4:13

*But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that **Christ's power** may rest on me.* - 2 Corinthians 12:9

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. - Isaiah 40:29-31

*I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably **great power for us who believe**. That power is like the working of his mighty strength.* - Ephesians 1:18-19 What has "His mighty strength" done? *Creation, raised Jesus from the dead, etc.*

*With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that **by his power** he may fulfill every good **purpose of yours** and every **act prompted by your faith**.* - 2 Thessalonians 1:11

*His divine power has given us **everything we need** for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.* - 2 Peter 1:3-4 Often our struggles come from our neglecting to use

¹⁰Portals of Prayer, "Getting What You Want." St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 5/5/1986.

what He has given us. We can sing even when there is no organist — He has given us voices!

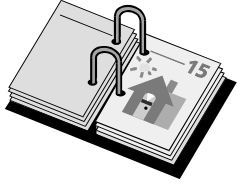
Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. - 2 Corinthians 3:5 Note the first phrase in this last one. We do not claim any competence for ourselves. If we did, that would be the sin of pride.

If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. -Galatians 6:3

You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. -Revelation 3:17

"Apart from me you can do nothing." -John 15:5b

If we find that the list of activities on the commitment form is somewhat daunting, here is the reason. We cannot, in our own strength do God's will. To decide to make a commitment on any of these activities is to step out in faith, trusting that God will provide all that is necessary. Decide to follow His purpose for your life, and then watch how He works through you.



Priorities

Two Worship Services

Suggested Scripture and Outlines

1. - The importance of purpose - January 11, 2009

Concentrate on the importance of purpose or vision. Suggested theme verses for sermons are:

1. *Proverbs 29:18*

Where there is no vision, the people perish.

2. *John 5:19*

The Son does what he sees the Father doing.

3. *Isaiah 42:1-7*

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope." This is what God the LORD says--he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

Introduction

We make New Year's resolutions.

We have priorities whether we know it or not.

A Christian's priorities should be different.

1. Who is my God?
2. How am I connected?
3. What does God expect of me?

I. We are God's special covenant people.

The covenant specifies what God will do to restore our relationship with Him.
Sin has estranged us from God.

II. He comes to us quietly in the Spirit.

- v. 2-3 the bruised reed - our fragile moments, close to the breaking point
He is there when we need Him -- when we are asking "Why?"
- v. 6 He calls us and takes us by the hand.

III. God gives us a purpose

- v. 7 gives Jesus' purpose

1 Peter 2:9-10 says we are to declare His praises.
We are a royal priesthood: empowered to forgive and say "No" to sin.

2. - Celebrate God's provision - February 1, 2009

The theme of this service is celebrating. The commitment is presented as part of the worship process.

This is the time at which commitment forms are turned in. It is recommended that just before the offering, an elder (or usher) brings the commitment form box forward, collecting any commitment forms that have not yet been turned in. This box is then placed on the altar and dedicated to God.

Some suggested theme verses for sermons are:

1. *Psalm 145:7*

*They will celebrate your **abundant** goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.*

2. *2 Chronicles 31:10*

Azariah the chief priest, from the family of Zadok, answered, "Since the people began to bring their contributions to the temple of the LORD, we have had enough to eat and plenty to spare, because the LORD has blessed his people, and this great amount is left over."

3. *1 Corinthians 8:1b-3*

Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.

Introduction: Many people will think that cleverness will put them on top

- the man who thinks that manipulating and controlling is the same as being a good manager
- the daughter who folded just the uppermost towels in the laundry basket
- the couple who put inaccurate information on their income tax return

But God warns us that short cuts have only short-term benefits, because they have no foundation in love. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up ...

- I. We try to build our lives on our own. The flesh, in conflict with the Spirit, tries to rule us.
- II. God wants to build us up in Christ's love. Christ has taken out a building permit on each of us — signed in blood. Rooted and grounded in love, we "grow up" into Christ. We need to let His love fill us and overflow to others.
- III. Each day should be a "Dedication Celebration." Thank God for His building plan in your life. Renew the dedication of His temple.

Small Group Bible Study Leader's Guide

Advantages of knowing your purpose in life

The popular 1984 film *Amadeus* told the life story of Mozart through the eyes of a man who claimed to have murdered the gifted composer. As the movie unfolds it becomes apparent that Salieri, the confessed "murderer," was a court musician who became intensely jealous of Mozart and, while he never physically harmed him, Salieri's schemes eventually ruined Mozart's life and health.

The early death of Mozart, depriving the world of unknown quantities of beautiful music, is only one tragedy portrayed in this film. A second tragedy is the tormented Salieri, who, if he had only recognized his God-given purpose in life, might have transformed the secular-minded, sensually-motivated Mozart into another Bach, a musician who truly dedicated all his works to the glory of God.

There are many examples in Scripture of people who knew their purpose in life. In this study we will look at the life of John the Baptist. Our goal will be to find some of the advantages of knowing one's purpose.

1. Guidance

With knowledge of your calling and destination, you have a star to navigate by. You have a basis for the choices you make regarding career, family, education and lifestyle. Let's look at how John's understanding of his purpose actually guided his steps:

"Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." -- Luke 1:16-17

". . . And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins," -- Luke 1:76-77

It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"--"a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." --Mark 1:1-8

Questions about the Scripture:

Note to leader: The discussion questions in normal print are on the handout. The material in italics after the questions is intended to help you guide the discussion and be sure that the intended points are covered.

1. What were some of the predictions made about John's ministry at the time of his birth? *He would be a prophet, he would prepare the way for the Lord, he would have the spirit and power of Elijah, he would teach about forgiveness of sins.*
2. What lifestyle did John choose? *Lived in the desert, open air preacher, no fancy clothes, lived off the land, sparse diet, poverty.*
3. What were the major themes of John's sermons? *Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, get ready for One to come, One Who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.*

Focus: The prophecies given by the angel and by Zechariah guided John as he grew to maturity. He was not named after his father as was the custom of the day, and he understood that he would not be going into the family business. While he probably did learn a trade, we can surmise that he spent much of his time searching the Scriptures for more clues as to how he should fulfill the prophecies. He found his "life verse" in Isaiah 40:3, "one crying in the wilderness." His role model was Elijah, who prepared the way for Elisha.

John's simple lifestyle was a powerful witness to his preaching on getting back to the basics. He chose to shun material comforts to highlight the eternal priorities he wanted to talk about. Perhaps he chose not to marry in order for people to see his total dedication to the Lord.

John was also careful to make his message conform to what he knew to be his calling: forerunner to Messiah. He brushed off both flattery and praise for himself and told everyone to look for the greater prophet Who would come after him.

Suppose John had never heard of God's plans for him, or if he ignored what had been said at his birth? Imagine Jesus arriving at the River Jordan, ready to be baptized -- only to find that John is tied up in Jericho, as head promoter of the Annual Grape-Stomping Festival there? Fortunately, John was guided by what he did know of God's purpose for him. He sought to know more, and increased knowledge gave him a greater sense of direction.

2. Strength

Knowledge of your purpose gives you strength through life's difficulties.

Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her." Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet. -Matthew 14:3-5

When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not,

what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. -Matthew 11:2-14

Questions about the Scripture:

1. What did John say that led to his arrest? *He told Herod it was unlawful for him to marry his brother's wife.*
2. Was John's accusation of Herod consistent with his preaching to people in general? *Yes, John preached repentance to all.*
3. Why do think John asked Jesus if He was really the Messiah? *Perhaps he was discouraged; perhaps he too looked for a militaristic Messiah; perhaps this was a witness to those around him.*
4. What things did Jesus say which probably strengthened John during his imprisonment? *Miracles were being performed, the good news was being preached, no one is greater than John the Baptist, John was the Elijah who was predicted.*

Focus: John was able to be comforted by a simple report from Jesus because of one thing — the report lined up with John's knowledge of his purpose in life. He could endure an unfair imprisonment and face death, so long as he knew he had not wasted his life, but had done his duty in preparing the way for the Christ. Take note of Jesus' comment about the kingdom of heaven "forcefully advancing, and forceful men have taken hold of it." (v. 12) Jesus praised John for knowing his purpose and being faithful to that purpose, and in a way he places all kingdom-seekers in John's shadow, for even weak faith is mightier than great physical strength.

3. Peace

Knowing your purpose keeps you close to the Lord.

They [certain Jews and John's disciples] came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan--the one you testified about--well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.

"The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. -John 3:26-4:2

Questions about the Scripture:

What reaction did the Jews hope to get from John by telling him he was losing disciples? *Probably jealousy and ill-will toward Jesus.*

What might their motive have been? *An attempt to undercut Jesus' ministry. This follows from the previous answer.*

John uses the "Best Man" metaphor to explain why he is not upset. How does his illustration fit his recognition of his purpose? *The best man is important to the wedding, but he is not the bridegroom -- John knew he was to prepare the way for Someone really important.*

John was not upset when Jesus became more famous and popular than he was. Can you think of other examples from history of people who were called to play "second fiddle?" *Examples from the Bible might be Barnabas or Timothy helping Paul, Aaron helping Moses, Jonathan aiding David, Andrew brought Peter to the Lord; from history -- Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee, Eleanor Roosevelt and FDR, Melancthon and Luther, Jim who did the hard work for Marlin Perkins on the Mutual of Omaha wild life show, the full back that provides the lead block for the star tailback.*

Focus: Although John presented an awesome figure, a wild man speaking harsh-sounding words, at heart he remained a humble man doing the will of God. His personal peace was not disturbed by circumstances that would have bothered a proud person bent on building his own fame. John understood his purpose, and as long as things seemed to be lining up with that, he remained calm. Undistracted by ambition or empire-building, John was able to gain deeper insight into God's plan for all mankind: notice the great truth he speaks in verses 35 and 36 (in bold print on the handout).

Putting it into practice:

1. No one gave a prophecy when I was born! How can I know what my purpose is? *Did you receive (or choose) a confirmation verse? Have you underlined verses in your Bible which have strongly spoken to you? Many hymns are based on Scripture; do you have a favorite hymn, song or psalm? If not, begin today to ask the Lord to give you "life verses" which will help to guide you. There is much general guidance in the Bible which applies to every human being: the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), the New Commandment (John 13:34-35), the*

Great Commission (Matthew 28:18), the Love Chapter (1 Corinthians 13), the Faith Chapter (Hebrews 11). For more focus on your particular calling, find readings, tapes, videos or small group studies on Spiritual Gifts and How to Know God's Will (your pastor, elder or church librarian can make suggestions). (The Sunday School portion of this study also addresses this question.)

2. Is my main purpose on Monday morning the same as on Sunday morning? If not, why not and what can I do to gain the effectiveness that comes from consistency? *Remember that the Devil will attempt to interfere with your determination to pursue goals in keeping with your purpose in life, if those purposes are Godly purposes. He wants you to serve his evil purposes. In the midst of temptations and discouragement, turn to your favorite verses for strength. Also, ask others to pray for you -- it really helps! Each time you choose God's way over the "other way" it gets easier to make right choices!*
3. How do you respond to criticism? How do you respond to praise? *No one is born into God's kingdom as a full-grown spiritual giant. We may grow at different rates, but all of us go through stages of growth from infancy to maturity in Christ. The spiritual "adolescent" is in a stage of trying out different roles and being hypersensitive to the slightest criticism; he is more interested in limelight than responsibility. The spiritual infant is too young to walk by faith and so depends on others but he is constantly hungry for new spiritual food. If you watch a mature Christian closely you discover he gets twice the work done for half the credit -- a true servant. Put each day of your life into the Savior's loving hands and you will have peace, no matter what stage you are in. Every seventh day, go to His house for praise, worship, and communion, and you will have peace -- no matter how mature you are.*
4. Did you do God's will in some small way today? *Praise God!* Did you wander away from your purpose in life? *Praise God for His forgiveness! He will never leave you nor forsake you.*

Conclusion

The advantages to knowing your purpose are really blessings. May guidance, strength and peace be yours as you seek to know His will.

[The Handout for this study is found on Page 61 of this manual.]

Leadership Meeting

This material should be presented to the recognized leaders of the church — Elders, Church Council, Board of Directors, etc. This may be done by taking a few minutes in a regularly scheduled meeting, or it may be done in a special meeting specifically for this purpose. A special meeting is most successful when a meal is included and spouses are invited.

The Board of Stewardship should have already made their commitments. Some of this material may be presented to them also.

Short presentation within another meeting

There are approximately 5,000 Christian churches in the United States that require a person to be tithing before he or she becomes a member. This is wrong. Churches should be open to new members. There should be few requirements for membership. Our procedure should be to welcome all whom we believe have sincerely turned to Jesus as their Savior and who trust the Bible; then we can disciple them to be what they should be.

However, the situation is different for church leaders. There are criteria specified in the Bible for church leaders.

1 Timothy 3:2-12 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ... Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. ... A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.

The people that lead a church are required by Paul to meet certain criteria. Note the theme that occurred several times in this passage. The leaders must be good managers, or stewards.

One of the reasons for these requirements is given in Titus 2:7 where Paul writes to Titus, "*In everything set them an example by doing what is good.*"

We, as leaders in the church, must realize that we cannot lead this church any further than we are willing to go ourselves. I am here, on behalf of the Board of Stewardship, to ask each one of you to accept your responsibility as a leader and as an example to the rest of the congregation. Please fill out the stewardship emphasis commitment form and place it in the commitment form box by the end of the last service next Sunday.

I also want to advise you that we are not asking anything of you that we are not willing to do ourselves. The Board of Stewardship, as leaders in the stewardship

area, have already turned in their forms. These people expressed the following commitments:

- ___ percent have committed to being in a worship service weekly.
- ___ percent have committed to being part of a regular group Bible study.
- ___ percent have committed to having personal or family devotions and prayer daily.
- ___ percent have committed to bringing the full tithe to the Lord.
- ___ percent have committed to offerings totaling \$_____ plus an average commitment of ___% of all or part of their income.
- ___ percent have resolved to be positive witnesses for Jesus Christ.
- ___ percent have committed to telling others about God's gift of salvation, including the naming of ___ specific people.
- ___ percent have committed to being involved in some ministry with ___ percent indicating they will begin work in at least one new ministry.

I am hoping that each of you can make a positive response in each category shown in the activities section on the form. If you cannot, please listen to the Bible passages discussed in next week's Sunday School before completing this form.

When I talk about being an example, please understand that no names will be used. The data will be summarized for the entire group of leaders that return the form and the data will be reported in a letter to the congregation that will be mailed a week from tomorrow. The form of the report will be basically the same as what I just gave you for the stewardship committee.

There is a box _____ that you may use to turn in the forms.

Thank you for your time in this meeting and your consideration of this request.

Special meeting

This is written as if this meeting occurs Saturday before the third Sunday School. It may actually be done anytime in that week, but may need to have some of the references to days adjusted.

What are the requirements for membership in this church? *Discuss.*

There are approximately 5,000 Christian churches in the United States that require a person to be tithing before he or she becomes a member. What would this criteria do to the growth of this church? Does anyone have an opinion of that idea? *This is wrong. Churches should be open to new members. There should be few requirements for membership. Our procedure should be to welcome all whom we believe have sincerely turned to Jesus as their Savior and who trust the Bible; then we can disciple them to be what they should be.* How do you know a prospect has sincerely turned to Jesus? *Their testimony of belief.* What would the elders do with someone who gives evidence of unbelief, say, a member of a cult that wants to join the church and says the right words, but will not leave the cult? *We have evidence that this person believes differently than the church. Therefore, they should be evangelized, not accepted as a fellow believer.* Once a believer enters the church, the work of the church continues as believers are disciplined to be more Christlike.

Is the situation the same for church leadership? Should we let just anyone who expresses an interest assume positions of authority within the congregation? *No, the situation is different for church leaders. There are criteria specified in the Bible for church leaders.*

1 Timothy 3:2-12 (parts) *Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ... Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. ... A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.*

The people that lead a church are required by Paul to meet certain criteria. What are some of the themes in this passage? *One theme that occurred several times in this passage is that leaders must be good managers, or stewards.* Why do you think God associated these requirements with leadership positions?

1. Jesus is the Head of the church. Ephesians. 5:22-24 tell us, *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.* The emphasis in this passage is on the behavior of wives, but there is another important concept here. What is the relation of the church to Christ?

Christ is the head of the church. The church should submit to Christ, that is to follow Him. Our God is a God of hierarchy. Would you expect a church led by someone who does not trust God to be able to follow Christ, our Leader? How can someone who does not know Christ be loyal to Him? If a leader were more familiar with the world's ways than God's, would he know how to guide the church to follow Christ, our Head?

2. Persons taking care of anything for another are expected to be faithful. *1 Corinthians 4:2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.* Not only must a leader be able to do what God directs, he must be willing to fulfill the duties he has assumed. It can be damaging to any organization to have people say that they will do something and then not do it. Consider the situation in Acts 9. Our Head, Jesus, had selected Paul, to be an Apostle. He is preaching in Damascus. Let's pick up with verses 23-25: *After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, ²⁴but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.* What if one of these followers had not been faithful to what he said he would do. He said he would hang on to a rope, but he doesn't. He lets go; the basket tips, and Acts 9 reads, "*zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz splat.*" Most of the New Testament does not get written. When we accept a position of leadership, we need to discharge our duties; we need to lead.

3. That brings us to the third reason for requirements being associated with leadership positions. In Titus 2:7, Paul writes to Titus, "*In everything set them an example by doing what is good.*" The word "leader" can be defined as one who has followers. God asked that the leaders do what is good so that the followers have an example. We, as leaders in the church, must realize that we cannot lead this church any further than we are willing to go ourselves. One seminar speaker I heard talked of the leaders as being the lid on the church. They set the top limit on how far the members will go in their Christianity.

There are two areas where the example can be set. The first area is the governance of the church as a whole. Is the church run in a way that shows faith and trust in God? Then the members are more likely to do that themselves. Is the church stingy in its giving? Then do not expect the members to be generous towards the church.

The other area where an example is set is by the leaders individually. For example, if there are respected leaders of the church that are not visibly in Bible study, what does that say to members? *Bible study is not important.* Note that I said leaders need to be visible to the members in their faithful acts. Even if we are in three weekly Bible studies at the office, we should teach or attend Sunday morning Bible study to visibly show our followers that Bible study is important.

The purpose for this meeting is to ask each one of you to accept your responsibility as a leader and as an example to the rest of the congregation. The commitment forms for the current stewardship emphasis will be sent to the congregation this week. (Pass out form.) We have some here for you to look at if you did not bring it with you. Please fill out the commitment form and place it in the offering

plate tomorrow place it in the commitment form box by the end of the last service next Sunday. The purpose of this early commitment process for the leadership is to “be an example by doing what is good.” When I talk about being an example, please understand that no names will be used. The data will be summarized for the entire group of leaders that return the form and the data will be reported in a letter to the congregation that will be mailed next Monday. The form of the report will be basically percentages of the forms turned in that showed a positive commitment in each of the eight areas shown on this form.

Let’s briefly look at form. We will go over the form in much more detail in the next Bible Study.

The form begins by asking you to write out the primary purpose for your life. You were asked to write such a purpose last week, so if you did your homework, this section should be easy.

Then we get into a section where commitments to activities that support the purpose may be expressed. The first two areas deal with the very important process by which others learn about God’s free gift to us of salvation. Two ways are mentioned in the Bible by which nonbelievers can learn from us about the Gospel — our walk and our talk. The first area on the form is a commitment to “walk the walk” — in other words, to be positive witnesses for Jesus Christ. Let others see that you are different from the rest of the world.

We are also told to tell others about the God who provided our salvation — to “talk the talk.” In this area, you are asked to think of specific people who need to hear the Gospel, and then commit to being sure they do hear it.

The next three categories are about time committed to fulfilling our purpose. We ask each person to be committed to being in a worship service weekly. This does not necessarily mean being at Sample Church weekly. Travel is not an excuse. There are other places to worship. Staying home with a sick child is not an excuse. Watch a good worship time on television. In some cases, you may need to run your own service, but set aside time to worship God every week.

Regular group Bible study is an important component of a Christian life. Again, this is not just talking about Sunday School. Many of you may be ministering to others during the Sunday School hour. That is a reason to not be in Sunday School yourself, but it is not an excuse to avoid regular group Bible study. You may go to a midweek Bible class, find a women’s or men’s group, or start or join a group at work. It is important to study God’s Word and to be encouraged by one another.

A complement to these group activities is to have personal or family devotions and prayer daily. This should include some quiet time to allow the Lord to speak to us.

The next two areas relate to handling material wealth. The starting point according to God's Word is to return His tithe to Him. This instruction, which we should follow out of our love for God, is fairly straight forward.

A bigger challenge arises in the next area. We are told that all our material wealth belongs to God. He gives specific direction for the first 10%, but what are we to do with the other 90%. Stewardship is as much about the that other 90% as the first 10%. There are many uses discussed in the Bible: food, clothing, housing, etc. and offerings. This section is where you commit some portion of that 90% to offerings. I do not know how to figure the correct amount for offerings for any of you, but I know that the Bible indicates that there are to be offerings to the Lord. Some of them may go to Sample Church, and some may go elsewhere. Pray about this and study God's Word to get help in deciding how much is to be given to each beneficiary. Note that this can be expressed as a percent of income or as a dollar amount. Also, recognize that this commitment is for you. Not all offerings are expected to be given to God through Sample Church.

The last area on the form is the area covered in the second Sunday School lesson. What specific ministries has God prepared for you to be involved in? Some may be ministries you are already doing; some may be new. As you review your spiritual gifts, talents, experiences, roles, and so on, you should come to some understanding of the ministries God wants you to work on. Note again that these are not necessarily to be done at Sample Church. These commitments are intended to help you decide the priorities for your life. Focus on God's will for your life, not the needs of Sample Church. If we get the entire membership to do this, God will take care of this church in a wonderful way and make it clear that He builds His church, reducing the temptation for us to be prideful about what we have done.

Please take this form and pray concerning this process. I believe that each of the areas shown on the form should be an important part of the life of every Christian. I am hoping that each of you can make a positive response in each category shown in the activities section on the form. If you cannot, please listen to the Bible passages discussed in next week's Sunday School before completing this form. That lesson is intended to show that the Bible discusses the importance of each of these areas.

I also want to advise you that I am not asking anything of you that I am not willing to do myself. I have already turned a form like this in at my home church, and there was something to which I committed in every area on that form. The Sample Church Stewardship Chairman has shared with me that he will be checking something in every area on his form also. I also want to advise you that the Board of Stewardship is not asking anything of you that they are not willing to do themselves. That board, as leaders in the stewardship area, has already turned in their forms. These people expressed the following commitments:

___ percent have committed to being in a worship service weekly.

- ___ percent have committed to being part of a regular group Bible study.
- ___ percent have committed to having personal or family devotions and prayer daily.
- ___ percent have committed to bringing the full tithe to the Lord.
- ___ percent have committed to offerings totaling \$_____ plus an average commitment of ___% of all or part of their income.
- ___ percent have resolved to be positive witnesses for Jesus Christ.
- ___ percent have committed to telling others about God's gift of salvation, including the naming of ___ specific people.
- ___ percent have committed to being involved in some ministry with ___ percent indicating they will begin work in at least one new ministry.

There is/will be a box _____ that you may use to turn in the forms. Once you have filled out your form, please pray for the others in the church who will be following your lead. They will be asked to turn in their forms on .

Thank you for your time in this meeting and your consideration of this request. God bless you and the church you serve.

Commitment Process

Board of Stewardship voluntarily commits early, as part of sponsoring the *Priorities* program. Hopefully, they, as leaders in the stewardship area, will be able to commit to something in every category on the form.

The Council (if any) and Elders are requested to commit on or before the third Sunday of Sunday school lessons in order to be examples to the rest of the congregation.

The rest of the congregation is requested to turn in commitments on or before the fourth Sunday of the Sunday school lessons. Actually allow one more Sunday before tabulating the results.

Survey those who do not turn in a commitment form to find out why they did not make a commitment. (Should get commitments from about 20% more people in this process.)

Follow up calls may be made by the Board of Stewardship or the Board of Elders to those who did not return a commitment form or a survey.

Note that this commitment form should take the spiritual temperature of each member. This information should be useful to each elder and pastor in discerning the needs of their flock. A failure to commit in any given area may be a symptom of a deeper spiritual problem that should be explored in the discipling process.



Priorities

Commitment Form

Purpose:

Please write a short summary of the primary purpose for your life:

Activities:

- I resolve to live my life as a positive witness to my faith in Jesus Christ.
- I will tell others about the free gift of salvation available to all through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, including the following people:

- I will be in a worship service weekly.

I will participate in the following Bible studies:

Sunday School

Other _____

- I will have personal or family devotions/prayer daily.

- I will return the full amount of God's tithe (10%) to the Lord.

I will bring the following offerings to the Lord:

(show recipient and either an amount or a percent of income)

Sample Church: _____

Other: _____

I will work to the glory of the Lord in the following ministries:

New Continue

Sample Church: _____

Other: _____

I recognize that I can keep these commitments only with the help of God.

Signature

Date

Printed name

(See Reverse for Bible References)

Bible references for each category:

Be a witness

Isaiah 43:10

Acts 1:8

1 Peter 3:15

Evangelism

Psalms 9:11

Luke 12:8-9

2 Timothy 1:8

Worship

Psalms 95:6

Matthew 4:10

Leviticus 19:30

Mark 2:27

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Psalms 122:1

Bible study

Acts 2:42

Hebrews 10:25

Proverbs 19:20

Prayer / personal devotions

Ephesians 6:18

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Jude 20

Psalms 16:7

John 8:47

John 16:3

Psalms 1:1-3

Psalms 119:105

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Tithe

Malachi 3:8-12

Proverbs 3:9

Deuteronomy 14:22 ff.

2 Corinthians 8:7-8

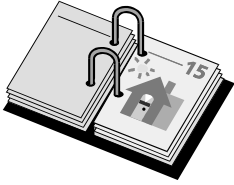
Proverbs 3:9-10

1 Timothy 6:9-10

Matthew 6:21

Offerings

Malachi 3:8-12



Priorities

God's Purpose for All Christians

Lesson 1 Worksheet

I. Introduction

II. There are four ways to find your purpose in life:

1. Deduction
2. Association
3. Emulation
4. Personalization

III. The right source

Isaiah 55:8-9

Matthew 6:19-20

IV. Major principles of living:

1. We are to know God and His ways.

Jeremiah 9:23-24

Psalms 103:7

2. We are to become Christ like.

Romans 8:29

3. We are to become involved in God's program.

Matthew 22:36-40

Colossians 1:28-29

Matthew 6:33

Matthew 28:19

V. Assignment

Write out a purpose statement for yourself. It should be short -- one or two sentences. Let it be something that you can remember so that it can guide you wherever you are. It is to be almost a slogan. Some examples to give you ideas are the following:

My purpose is to go to heaven and take as many people as possible with me.

My purpose is to know God and make Him known.

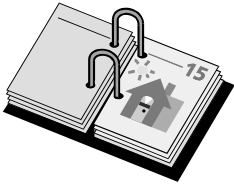
My purpose is to glorify God and enjoy His presence forever.

My purpose is to glorify God as I participate with Him in the process of becoming prepared for eternity in heaven.

My purpose is to glorify and edify Christ in all I do.

Luke 19:10

Jeremiah 29:11



Priorities

Finding God's Specific Purpose for Me Lesson 2 Worksheet

Use this form to record the evidence discovered that will help you decide upon the specific activities that God has planned for you.

Spiritual gifts:

See *1 Corinthians 12:4-7*, *1 Peter 4:10*

The five E's for discovering spiritual gifts:

1. Explore — *Romans 12:6-8*, *1 Corinthians 12*, *Ephesians 4:11-12*
2. Experiment
3. Enjoy
4. Expect results
5. Encouragement

What are the spiritual gifts that have been given to you by the Holy Spirit?

Talents:

What are the talents that God has provided to you for His work? *Ephesians 2:10*

Equipping:

What training has God provided to you in preparation for His work?

Personal history:

What experiences have been used by God to provide insight into His ways?

Roles:

What roles do you play in God's plan at this time? (Circle all that apply.)

Husband: Love your wife - *Colossians 3:19, 1 Peter 3:7, Ephesians 5:25*

Wife: Submit to your husband - *Ephesians 5:22, 1 Peter 3:5-6*

Parent: Bring your children up in the training and instruction of the Lord - *Ephesians 6:4, Proverbs 22:6, Deuteronomy 6:1-2, 4-9, Psalm 112:1-2, 1 Corinthians 13:11*

Child: Obey your parents - *Ephesians 6:1-3*

Family member: Care for others in the family - *1 Timothy 5:8*

Employee: Serve as if you were serving the Lord - *Ephesians 6:5-8*

Employer or supervisor: Treat employees fairly and allow them to pursue God's purpose for their lives also - *Ephesians 6:9, Jeremiah 22:13, James 5:4*

Widow or widower: Pray - *1 Timothy 5:5-6*

Other: _____

Temperament:

What type of temperament has God given to you?

Choleric - Wide emotional range, excitable, never lukewarm, changeable

Sanguine - Cheerful, confident, optimistic, hopeful

Melancholy - Pensive, pessimistic, thoughtful, cautious, sensitive

Phlegmatic - Calm, cool steady, dependable, orderly, patient

Calling:

Has God called you for a specific ministry? If so, what?

What ministries and activities will you do in response to these gifts from God?



Priorities

How Do I Know If I Am in God's Will? Lesson 4 Worksheet

This is the Sunday that we are asked to turn in the commitment form. The information will be recorded and the form will be returned to you. It is hoped that you will put this form some place where you will see it every morning. That way, you will start each day with a reminder of what is really important.

The commitment form begins with the purpose for your life. Embed that in your mind so that you can make decisions throughout the day on the basis of that statement. When you are considering an action, ask yourself, "Is this course of action consistent with my purpose for living?" or "Does this action do the best job of accomplishing my purpose in life?" A major reason for ineffective lives is the fact that decisions are often made on the spur of the moment reflecting short term desires, rather than in the context of a well-reasoned set of priorities. Here is a set of priorities that you have worked on for the last few weeks. That is the first step toward accomplishing your purpose. The second step is to use these priorities in making everyday decisions.

If the statement of purpose and activities is going to be used in this manner, we want to be sure it is right for us. Let us look at four evidences that we have found God's plan for our lives.

Fruit

Following God's plan should make a difference in the results of your efforts.

Titus 3:14

2 Peter 1:5-8

James 3:13

John 15:4-5a

John 15:8

Romans 7:4

Matthew 6:19-20

Focus on people

If our purpose is really God's purpose, it must recognize as important whatever is important to God.

Deuteronomy 32:9-10 What does this mean, to be God's portion?

People are of ultimate worth to God. This is especially evident when we think about the price paid for our salvation. There are also numerous passages that emphasize the importance of being focused on people, not on things.

John 21:15-17 Who are Jesus' sheep? What does it mean to feed them?

James 1:27 What actions are discussed? Does keeping oneself from being polluted by the world mean that we must avoid contact with nonchristians?

1 *John 4:7* What is required to be able to truly love another person?

1 *John 4:11* What should our response to this gift of salvation be?

1 *John 4:21* How can you love God without loving the image of God? Why do we not love some individuals? How do we love our brother?

1 *John 3:17-18* What is the nature of love as expressed by John?

Contentment

A God-centered purpose should produce contentment in your life through the awareness that God has provided all that is needed for His wonderful plan.

1 *Timothy 6:6*

If we trust that the Lord intends to bless us, then it is logical to assume that what we have is exactly what is best for us. Therefore, we should be happy with it.

Philippians 4:11-12 Where does this contentment come from?

Luke 3:14

1 *Thessalonians 5:16-18*

Hebrews 13:5-6

Dependence on God

The pursuit of a Godly purpose should increase our awareness of our dependence on God. By ourselves, we cannot do God's will.

Romans 7:18

There are numerous promises of His help in the Bible:

Philippians 4:13

2 Corinthians 12:9

Isaiah 40:29-31

Ephesians 1:18-19 What has "His mighty strength" done?

2 Thessalonians 1:11

2 Peter 1:3-4 Often our struggles come from our neglecting to use what He has given us.

2 Corinthians 3:5

Galatians 6:3

Revelation 3:17

John 15:5b

If we find that the list of activities on the commitment form is somewhat daunting, here is the reason. We cannot, in our own strength do God's will. To decide to make a commitment on any of these activities is to step out in faith, trusting that God will provide all that is necessary. Decide to follow His purpose for your life, and then watch how He works through you.



Priorities

Advantages of Knowing Your Purpose in Life Small Group Bible Study Worksheet

There are many examples in Scripture of people who knew their purpose in life. In this study we will look at the life of John the Baptist. Our goal will be to find some of the advantages of knowing one's purpose.

1. Guidance

"Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." -- Luke 1:16-17

". . . And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins," -- Luke 1:76-77

It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"--"a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." --Mark 1:1-8

1. What were some of the predictions made about John's ministry at the time of his birth?
2. What lifestyle did John choose?
3. What were the major themes of John's sermons?

2. Strength

Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her." Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet. --Matthew 14:3-5

When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days

of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. -Matthew 11:2-14

1. What did John say that led to his arrest?
2. Was John's accusation of Herod consistent with his preaching to people in general?
3. Why do think John asked Jesus if He was really the Messiah?
4. What things did Jesus say which probably strengthened John during his imprisonment?

3. Peace

They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan--the one you testified about--well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.

*"The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. **The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.**"*

The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. -John 3:26-4:2

1. What reaction did the Pharisees hope to get from John by telling him he was losing disciples?
2. What might their motive have been?
3. John uses the "Best Man" metaphor to explain why he is not upset. How does his illustration fit his recognition of his purpose?
4. John was not upset when Jesus became more famous and popular than he was. Can you think of other examples from history of people who were called to play "second fiddle?"

Putting it into practice:

1. No one gave a prophecy when I was born! How can I know what my purpose is?
2. Is my main purpose on Monday morning the same as on Sunday morning? If not, why not and what can I do to gain the effectiveness that comes from consistency?
3. How do I respond to criticism? How do I respond to praise?
4. Did I do God's will in some small way today? Did I wander away from my purpose in life?