

God's Report Card

Welcome back to Session Two of Walking with Purpose. I hope you've been enjoying some fellowship with your group, have eaten some snacks and are ready to learn how to receive a good grade on God's report card! Last week we talked about what is really the most important question you can ask yourself: "What am I doing here? What is my purpose?" We saw that meaning to our lives can only come in living them for His purposes, and being part of His family. You know...you can be successful in life and never know your purpose, but you can *also* be labeled "unsuccessful" and fulfill your purpose perfectly!

A band director for a local high school found great meaning in his job. He loved the air of excitement as each year a new group of kids signed up to join his band. They dreamed of becoming musicians as each would choose their favorite instrument, whether it be the drums, trumpet, clarinet or flute. Elaina decided on the flute. He led the new recruits through the rudimentary lessons of how to put the three sections together, blow into the hole of the top section, and where to place their fingers. Going down the line, each student made a sound for the teacher...until he came to Elaina. She was a pretty, but fragile-looking girl. Try as she might, the biggest breath she could muster didn't produce any sound at all. "Don't worry", the teacher assured her, "You'll soon be able to play." At the end of rehearsal the kids left as excitedly as they had entered. As the beginning band improved, Elaina was always there, but looking more frail with each passing week. She still couldn't make a sound, but her friends continued to encourage her. By now, Elaina knew the fingerings and did everything correctly, so the director knew she had been practicing. She was a sweet and patient girl; and since she'd made the effort to learn, he didn't pressure her. Yet one day, after rehearsal, he felt the need to ask, "Elaina, you don't seem to have enough energy to play the flute. Is anything wrong?" And with a maturity beyond her years, she looked up with big, brown eyes and said, "I have cystic fibrosis and I'm going to die." As tears formed in the teacher's eyes and a lump came to his throat, he could only nod. He knew that this disease filled her lungs with a thick mucous that clogged her airways, making it hard to breathe, let alone play a wind instrument. "Why did you take up the flute since you have trouble breathing?" he asked. In a small but determined voice, she responded, "I've always wanted to play the flute and I love it...even though I can't make a sound." As the weeks passed, Elaina coughed and choked more, yet she continued learning the new notes. No noise came from her flute until one day she used what little strength she had left to emit three beautiful notes. The band broke out in cheers and applause. They would never hear her play again, but also would never forget her courage and joy as she walked in her purpose.



Fellowship

1. What have you done that just felt “right”...like you were created to do it?



Discipleship

I think all of us would agree that you can't ask an invention what its purpose is. If I find a watch, I can't expect it to tell me why it was created. So how do I go about finding out its usefulness? The best way is to go to the watchmaker...the creator...and also by looking in the owner's manual! That's what we'll do today: we'll find out what God says about your purpose, how you can fulfill it, and use His owner's manual as a guide.

Jesus got a perfect score on **His** divine report card! John 17:4 says, “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.” Whenever a created thing does what it's created to do, it brings glory to God! Picture it: an industrious ant, faithfully carrying tiny crumbs of bread to its colony, brings glory to God. A sunset in all its shining brilliance brings glory to God. Even a pig, wallowing in the mud acting so very...pig-like...brings glory to God! And every time **you** do what God created you to do, He smiles and is filled with joy! So now we must ask ourselves: “What am I created to do?” That's where God's instruction manual comes in. The Bible is filled with advice on how to live in order to bring glory to Him. Turn with me to Ephesians 1 verses 3-14 as we read it together. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.”

Just think! He created us to be holy and blameless in His sight; to be His kids and act like it. To fellowship with Him and enjoy His presence. This takes a bit of pressure off of us, doesn't it? Elaina brought a smile to God's face when she just fingered the flute, doing her best with what God gave her. Enjoying His gift of music, her life was a gift to others and God Himself. The world's standards of success don't have to bind us as long as we know we are pleasing our Creator! John Newton, the writer of the most popular hymn in history, "Amazing Grace" said: "If two angels in heaven were given assignments by God at the same time, one of them to go and rule over the greatest nation on earth and the other to go sweep the streets of the dirtiest village, each angel would be completely indifferent as to which one got which assignment. It simply wouldn't matter to them. Why? Because the real joy lies in being obedient to God. For a Christ follower, the important thing isn't what God has us doing; the important thing is that we're doing what God wants us to do." That's what gave Jesus His joy and approbation from God...and it's what will earn us a good grade as well.

Keith Hernandez is one of baseball's top players. He won a batting championship for having the highest average, the Most Valuable Player award in his league, and even the World Series. Yet with all of his accomplishments, he has missed out on something crucially important to him -- his dad's acceptance and recognition that what he has accomplished is valuable. In a very candid interview about his relationship with his father, Keith related one of their conversations: "Dad, I have a lifetime 300 batting average. What more do you want?" His father replied, "But someday you're going to look back and say, 'I could have done more.'" How many of us have felt like our best just wasn't good enough? That we've wasted years trying to please someone who refused to give us approval? The truth that can set you free today is this: you already have it! God loves you and created you for His pleasure and fellowship. You bring a smile to His face just by being yourself and walking in obedience to Him. When the whole world judges you with *their* criteria of success, God has a completely different grading scale! **He** is the ultimate grade-giver and the only loving Master you need to please!

Remember back in John 17:4 when Jesus said, "I have brought you glory on earth by **completing** the work you gave me to do"? In the same way, **your** final report card won't be issued until God is finished with your work on earth. It's never too late to live for him, and you are never too old.

Retirement is a blessing in some ways, but it's also dangerous. It implies that your productivity stops when you're in your 60's. Many people look forward to retiring so they can get out of responsibility, relax and maybe even travel. They figure they've put in their time, and the younger folks can have a turn. Now, while you may want to refocus your interests and redirect your involvement (even in the church), don't quit! Don't stop pursuing God's pleasure no matter what your age. God uses the example and wisdom of those who are older. The Bible is full of examples of people who kept enduring until the end. Abraham's wife Sarah was 90 when she gave birth to Isaac. Moses was 80 when he led the children of Israel out of Egypt. Caleb was 85 when he conquered the hill country

in Palestine. Simeon was an old man in the temple when he held the baby Jesus in his arms. History, also, testifies that people don't lose their purpose when they turn 65. Picasso was past 75 when he dominated the art world. George Bernard Shaw was still writing plays when he was 90. Michelangelo did some of his best painting after 80. No matter how long God permits you to live, continue to serve and be an inspiration to others.

If you are still alive and in this small group, class isn't out yet...and **you** can use each day to bring a smile to His face!

2. Read Psalm 149:4. Does this image of God coincide with your previous view of God?
3. Re-read Ephesians 1:3-14. What gives God pleasure in verse 5? In verses 9, 10?
4. Read the following verses aloud:

Revelation 4:11
Psalm 149:4a
Psalm 119:135
Psalm 147:11
Proverbs 11:20
Proverbs 12:22

How can you bring pleasure to God in your lives based on these verses?

5. Discuss this quote by atheist Bertrand Russell:

“Unless you assume a God, the question of life's purpose is meaningless.”



Ministry

6. Have one or two more group members share their stories of how they became part of God's family.



Evangelism

7. Share how your conversations with your unsaved friends went this past week.



Worship

8. You are not “lost” in the sea of humanity and hidden from His sight. Take turns reading the verses of Psalm 147 as you worship His tender yet powerful care.

9. Share prayer requests and commit them in prayer to the only One who has the power to take care of them.