

## ***Purpose in focus***

Welcome back to Walking with Purpose! As we wind down this series, my prayer is that every week God's been giving you *clarity* regarding His 5 purposes for your life! As the saying goes, "If you don't have a goal, you'll reach it every time."

Daniel Webster was a powerful orator who gave *early evidence* of his quick mind and way with words. One day Webster's father prepared to leave home. He left Daniel and his brother Ezekiel specific work instructions. But on his return, he found the task still undone! He questioned his sons about their idleness. "What have you been doing, Ezekiel?" he asked. "Nothing, sir." "Well, *Daniel*, what have *you* been doing?" To which he replied, "Helping Zeke, sir." (*chuckle*)

A cute story, but *not* how I want to end my life. My life's goal is to one day hear Christ say to me, "Well done, my good and faithful servant!"



## ***Fellowship***

1. Answer honestly:

What is your #1 goal here on earth?

What do you hope people remember you for?



## ***Discipleship***

In a popular movie a few years back, a wizened old man gave the secret of life to a confused, disillusioned and worn-out young man searching for life's meaning. He held up one finger (*hold up finger to demonstrate*) as he said, "The secret of life is this. It's just one thing...*pursuing one thing.*"

This hit home with the young man. He'd been in pursuit of so many things...none of which satisfied. He was divided somehow. How could his life be about so many things...and yet, be about nothing?

How often do we find ourselves in the same quandary? We have a list of things we want to be, to accomplish and achieve...yet with no one *single* thing in focus. Brothers and sisters, I want to take some pressure off you today! God wants to take the pressure off! He says that His yoke is easy and His burden light! This *journey of faith* will not always be *easy*...worthwhile things rarely are! But purpose always produces passion. Nothing *energizes* like a clear purpose. Yet the opposite is also true: *passion dissipates* when you lack purpose.

If you can get up in the morning and say, “Lord, if I don’t get *anything else done today*, may I *know* You a little bit better and *love* You a little bit more”? You’ve been a successful disciple of Christ! Knowing and loving Him gives us *energy and focus* to fulfill our purpose.

The Taj Mahal is one of the most beautiful and costly tombs ever built...but there is something equally fascinating about its beginnings. In 1629, the favorite wife of Indian ruler Shah Jahan died. He ordered that a magnificent tomb be built as a memorial to her. The shah placed his wife’s casket in the middle of a parcel of land, and construction of the temple literally began around it. But several years into the venture, the Shah’s grief for his wife gave way to a passion for the project. One day while he was surveying the sight, he reportedly stumbled over a wooden box, and he had some workers throw it out. It was months before he realized that his wife’s casket had been destroyed. *The original purpose* for the memorial became lost in the details of construction...his first love lost, and his passion misplaced.

The church of Ephesus was like that! They started out strong, worked hard, did good deeds, and couldn’t tolerate wickedness. Yet somewhere along the way, they lost their first love. Turn with me to Revelation 2, verses 1 through 7. It says this:

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

What a timeless message for the church today! We can be so “busy” doing so many “things”...even while we think we are pleasing God. Yet, like an unfaithful spouse, be breaking God’s heart in the meantime!

It's so crucial to keep our passion for Christ as our focus! The word "focus" is defined as "a center of activity, **attraction**, or attention; a point of concentration; **directed** attention." What a key to living a successful Christian life! Keeping Christ the center of our activity; the center of our affection and attraction. Making Him our point of concentration and attention.

Sadly, like the shah, when our focus is lost, so is our purpose. I heard once of a man who was looking in the phone book at the listing of restaurants. He came across an entry for a place called the "The Church of God Grill". The peculiar name aroused his curiosity so he dialed the number. A man answered with a cheery, "Hello! Church of God Grill!" The stunned man asked how this restaurant had been given such an unusual name. The worker replied, "Well, we had a little mission down here, and we started selling chicken dinners after church on Sunday to help pay the bills. Well, people liked the chicken, and we did such a good business, that eventually we cut back on the church service. After awhile, we just closed down the church altogether and kept on serving chicken dinners. We kept the name we started with, and that's 'The Church of God Grill.'"

Whatever we focus on, we begin to prioritize. If we're not careful, like the Church of God Grill, our focus strays...as does our love and passion for Him!

Never confuse activity with productivity. Knowing your purpose simplifies your life. You will never have time to do all that people would **like** or **expect** you to do! Yet knowing your purpose...why God created you, with all your individual gifts and abilities...will be the standard you use to determine which activities are **essential** and which are dead weight. Simply ask yourself, "Does this activity help me fulfill one of God's purposes for my life?" Is this God's plan, or something that is just keeping me "busy"? Even Satan won't mind your good deeds done for the wrong reasons...if it keeps you from a focused and passion-filled life.

William Hinson tells us why animal trainers carry a stool when they go into a cage of lions. They have their whips, of course, and their pistols are at their sides. But invariably they also carry a stool. Hinson says it is the most important tool of the trainer. He holds the stool by the back and thrusts the legs toward the face of the wild animal. Since the animal tries to focus on all four legs at once, a kind of paralysis overwhelms him. He then becomes tame, weak, and disabled because its attention is fragmented.

Colossians 3, verses 1 through 4 say, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, **set your hearts** on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. **Set your mind** on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." You see, when we set our hearts and minds on God and heavenly things, all else just pales in comparison.

Native hunters in the jungles of Africa have a clever way of trapping monkeys. They slice a coconut in two, hollow it out, and in one half of the shell cut a hole just big enough for a monkey's hand to pass through. Then they place an orange in the other

coconut half before fastening together the two halves of the coconut shell. Finally, they secure the coconut to a tree with a rope, retreat into the jungle, and wait.

Sooner or later, an unsuspecting monkey swings by, smells the delicious orange, and discovers its location inside the coconut. The monkey then slips his hand through the small hole, grasps the orange, and tries to pull it through the hole. Of course, the orange won't come out; it's too big for the hole. To no avail the persistent monkey *continues* to pull and pull, never realizing the danger he is in.

While the monkey struggles with the orange, the hunters simply stroll in and capture the monkey by throwing a net over him. As long as the monkey keeps his fist wrapped around the orange, the monkey is trapped.

It's too bad—the poor monkey could've saved its life if it would've let go of the orange! It rarely occurs to a monkey, however, that it can't have *both* the orange *and* its freedom. That delicious orange becomes a deadly trap.

The world sets traps for you that are not unlike the monkey trap. You hear constantly that if you just have enough money, enough stuff, enough power, enough prestige...*then* you'll be happy. Under that illusion, people spend their whole lives thinking you must have it all.

The call of Christianity is unlike that of the world. The world focuses on what you can get out of life. A Christian is called to a higher purpose with eternal rewards.

On the morning of September 11, Jeannie Braca switched on the television to check the weather report, only to hear that a plane had just hit the World Trade Center.

Jeannie's husband, Al, worked as a corporate bond trader in one of the towers.

Al had survived the World Trade Center bombing in 1993 and had even helped a woman with asthma escape from the building.

Jeannie knew that Al would do the same thing this time, "I knew he would stop to help and minister to people," she said, "but I never thought for a minute that he wouldn't be coming home!"

A week later, like so many others who were in that building, Al's body was found in the rubble. Al's wife, Jeannie, and his son Christopher were devastated.

Then the reports began to trickle in from friends and acquaintances. Some people on the 105th floor had made a last call or sent a final e-mail to loved ones saying that a man was leading people in prayer.

A few referred to Al by name.

Al's family learned that Al *had indeed* been ministering to people during the attack!

When Al realized that they were all trapped in the building and would not be able to escape, Al shared the gospel with a group of 50 co-workers and led them in prayer.

This was no surprise to Jeannie.

For years, she and Al had been praying for the salvation of these men and women.

According to Jeannie, Al hated his job and couldn't stand the environment. It was a world so out of touch with his Christian values, but he wouldn't quit.

Al was convinced that God wanted him to stay there, to be a light in the darkness, and although Al would not have worded it this way, "to be a hero"!

Al was not ashamed of Christ and Christ's words...and he paid the price of taking up his cross daily. Al shared his faith with his co-workers...many of whom reacted

sarcastically.

Yet on that fateful day...on September 11, within minutes of airplanes hitting the twin towers in New York City...in the midst of the chaos...Al's co-workers looked to him—and Al delivered!

Al's son, Christopher, said this:

“He loved to lead people to Christ. That takes away a lot of the hurt and pain.”

What an example of a purpose in focus. Easy? No. Is there a price to pay? Absolutely! But the rewards are beyond our imagination.

There was an elderly Christian whose advancing years had taken their toll on her memory. As her health faded, the time came that she could recite but a single verse...2 Timothy 1:12: "I know whom I have believed and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day."

Even *these* words slowly slipped away from her memory until only a few days of her life remained and friends would hear her repeat just seven words. "that which I've entrusted to Him."

Finally as the hour of the women's death neared and her memory was all but gone, she voiced a single word repeatedly; it was all she could remember:

"HIM! HIM! HIM!"

*He* had been her focus...her true love...and even when all else was gone, she had Him!

U.S. Marines conduct a secret sniper program. The school admits 25 men for an eight week course of *sixteen hour days*. Very few pass. To graduate, each goes on a mock mission into a well defined area where instructors search for the sniper. If they can find him, they can fail him.

To get in range of the target, a sniper may move forward at a rate of one inch per hour. He may sit for days absolutely still, despite cold, rain, insect bites and fear. No one gets out without singleness of heart.

The truth is, we *expect* that kind of intensity and focus from our military, from doctors, Olympic champions, and concert pianists. But *God expects it from us*. Our King of Kings *deserves* singleness of heart and focus.



**Ministry**

2. Read I John 2:15-17 and I Timothy 6:10. What things crowd out our love for God?

How can “good things” steal our focus?

3. Read Psalm 90:12. How will numbering our days give us wisdom?
4. Discuss this quote by John Bever: “The most effective way for the enemy to blind us is to cause us to focus on ourselves.”
5. Read Mark 12:28-31. What does God prioritize?
6. Do you have a hard time saying “no” to worthwhile causes? To pressure from people?

***Read Matthew 12:46-50.*** How does Jesus stand up against pressure to do what people expected of Him?

7. Re-read Revelation 2:1-7. How can you relate to the Church in Ephesus?



## **Evangelism**

8. How is the command of Mark 12:31 related to your concern for the lost?



## **Worship**

9. Pray for each other: single-minded devotion and strength for the week to come!
10. End your time with a focus on Him by reading Psalm 33:12-22.