

# WHAT'S YOUR PURPOSE?

## PRODIGAL MESSAGE #5

### Memory verse of the week:

**Colossians 3:17 ESV: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”**

*A young mother was attending her second week of the Prodigal Ministry. She was sitting in a newcomer class that I was leading, describing how she had been somewhat empowered to set some boundaries with her prodigal daughter after having visited Prodigal just once so far. Not surprisingly, her daughter pushed back against the new boundaries—she ran away from home. Her siblings told their mom that the prodigal was headed to the local Greyhound station to catch a bus to visit her aunt in California. Upon hearing this news, the mother immediately rushed to the station and found her daughter. She then bought her daughter a plane ticket to California as she couldn't bare the thought of her daughter braving a bus ride across the country.*

*In response to the mother's story, I asked her what her goal was? She seemed puzzled, so I reframed the question: “What is your purpose in life? What would a win look like for you and your daughter?” She instantly began to weep as she passionately and sincerely related to the entire group that all she ever wanted was to be a good mom. She wanted her daughter to like her, to love her, and to be her best friend. I responded that such a paradigm—that is, such a purpose—would explain her actions.*

*That exchange was a lesson to me of just how important it is to have a clearly defined purpose—based on truth—to help us navigate life's challenging and emotional times.*

### Introduction

Most of us have never thought about our purpose in life. As a participant in Prodigal, you will be asked to think about the end of your life. How do you want your life to be remembered? If you could look back on your life, what would a “win” or a “success” look like? Once you determine your purpose, you will have a rudder not only to guide your prodigal journey, but also to guide your everyday decision-making for the rest of your life. **Our actions are driven by our beliefs.** The Prodigal Ministry suggests that having a life purpose of “bringing glory to God above all else” will bring you ultimate meaning and reward. Such a purpose will assist you to make prudent decisions based on *biblical wisdom*—the paradigm of truth that, we believe, reaps joy now and reaps rewards into eternity.

“A man without a purpose is like a ship without a rudder—a waif, a nothing, a no man.”  
– Thomas Carlyle

### Prodigal participants want a plan!

Everyone who comes to Prodigal wants a useful plan that will guide them to personal peace, family order, and their prodigal's return. Most plans require objective boundaries and enforced consequences. The best plans are simple ones that can be easily understood and followed.

The reason most plans fail is not the mechanics of the plan itself, but one's inability to carry out the plan (see Romans 7:18–19). The only way that a plan will be successful is if you believe in it enough to fully follow it. And you will only believe in a plan if you are convinced without a doubt that it is rooted in true, sound principles that will not buckle under even the heaviest of pressure.

The truth you follow defines your Personal Mission Statement (PMS). Your PMS is the written statement that defines your “purpose” (or “mission”) in life. After it has been developed and refined, your PMS should guide every decision that you make. It defines why you get out of bed each day. It defines your relationships, your career choices, your calendar, and even your check book. It determines your character and actions when no one is looking. And it determines how you lead yourself and those around you. Some sources quote the former professional boxer, Mike Tyson, as saying, “Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face.” Well, a well-defined and deeply ingrained PMS will allow you to shake it off and refocus when life punches you in the face, so that you can continue to live out your purpose well.

### **Why do good plans fail?**

We have an entire message devoted to “the plan” in weeks to come. For the purpose of this message, we simply need to define, first, what a successful plan is and, second, how critical a clearly defined purpose is in successfully executing that plan. A good plan restores order and peace to *your* life and *your* home and provides an optimal recovery environment in which your prodigal stands the best chance to succeed. It is often a difficult paradigm shift for friends and family to understand that “the plan” is *primarily for themselves* and only secondarily for their prodigal. Make no mistake: we love and pray for your prodigal to come to their senses, but you cannot control how they respond to your plan. They are not here in this ministry with you.

With this perspective in mind, we again address the problem of why plans fail. The answer is clear and simple, yet hard to hear and accept: **plans fail because of lack of trust in God, and such a lack of trust is caused by an incorrect or incomplete view of God.** A. W. Tozer's famous quote sums up this concept quite well: “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us...Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason, the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.”<sup>1</sup>

For our purpose in life to be clearly defined, therefore, we must have a correct view of God accompanied by a steadfast faith. If our purpose is not clearly defined in such a way, then our plan isn't likely to succeed. However, if our purpose and plan are rooted in truth—the truth of God's Word and the truth about God Himself—then we can trust God fully, act consistent with our purpose, and, as a result, have a high likelihood of successfully executing our plan.

A couple of weeks ago, we discussed “the process.” The entire Prodigal curriculum is a methodical process of revealing the character of God for the purpose of viewing Him clearly and accurately and, thus, trusting Him. Part of *your* process will be

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<sup>1</sup> A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 1.

to discover verses that will allow you to define God and that will give you insight into His character. Here are a few to consider in your exploration:

- Ephesians 1:3–10: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”
- Romans 8:28: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”
- John 3:16–17: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”
- Revelation 21:4: “[God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

### What is *your* purpose?

Once you have determined your purpose, you need the discipline to let it guide you. Would those closest to you be able to confirm that you are following your PMS? Does your purpose drive everything that you do? How does your calendar line up with your purpose? Are you spending your time, talents, and treasures on things that align with your purpose? Where do you find the most satisfaction and reward in this life?

To be clear, we don’t ask these questions in order to intimidate or offend you. Instead, we expect that your *answers* to these questions will help you determine what is truly guiding your life and if you are really following through on your stated purpose. It is fairly obvious what drives people, as it simply plays out in their character and in the choices they make. We can tell if people are driven by fear, revenge, resentment, entitlement, people-pleasing, or the like. We can tell if they put God first—or, as is often the case, last.

### A purpose that glorifies God

Ultimately, there are really only two overarching choices concerning how you can choose to live your life: **life either revolves around you, or it revolves around God.** The following Scriptures clearly point to what our purpose should be:

- Ephesians 1:11–12: “In [Christ] we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the *purpose of him* who works all things according to the *counsel of his will*, so that **we** who were the first to hope in Christ **might be to the praise of his glory.**”

- 2 Timothy 1:9: "...God, who saved us and **called us to a holy calling**, not because of our works but because of *his own purpose* and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began."
- Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Let's say that you want your life to be marked by service to others. If that service is not motivated by bringing glory to God, then that service is, at its core, *self-serving*. Indeed, God is actually the one that gives us acts of service to do in the first place (see Ephesians 2:10). God is also the one who has a specific "race" marked out for each of us (see Hebrews 12:1). Since, the Prodigal Ministry has unapologetically defined our guidebook as the Bible, we submit that our God-centered purpose is to **glorify God alone**—that is, we recognize God as firmly installed on the throne and we live fully for Him, trusting in Him and obeying His Word.

God tells us through His Word that by trusting in and living for Him alone, we will be able to lead ourselves, our families, and those in our sphere of influence well (Psalms 37:30–31; 78:72; Isaiah 42:10). Furthermore, we can have joy despite our circumstances because we know that God cares for us right now in our present struggles (Psalm 55:22; 1 Peter 5:6–7). He does not want us to grow weary and lose heart (Matthew 11:28–30; Hebrews 12:3). Following the one who has overcome the world (that is, Jesus Christ) and trusting in the Scriptures that God has given us will direct our paths and guide us through all the storms of life (John 16:33; Proverbs 3:5–6). Such a purpose, then, becomes an *eternal purpose*—one that reaps joy now and rewards into eternity.

### **Parenting with a purpose**

Not everyone in the Prodigal Ministry is a parent dealing with a prodigal child, but most are. Even if your prodigal is not your child, I believe that the following truths will be worth considering in regard to your role and purpose in dealing with your prodigal.

With this message's principles in mind, it may be helpful to review how parenting might look if accomplished with the clearly defined purpose: to glorify God. Imagine, for a moment, that you are recently married and wanting to start a family, when suddenly the angel of the Lord appears before you just as clearly as he did with the Old Testament prophets. What if the angel said, "**Your purpose is solely to bring glory to God.** The Lord has heard your prayer for children, so He will grant your wish. However, you can bring Him great glory by parenting well and remembering that these precious gifts are not your own; they are His alone. As you have experienced trouble, so will they. Teach them my Word and model it's teachings for them so that they would lean not on their own understanding, but in all ways acknowledge me alone as I direct their paths. Teach them that their security, trust, and peace are found only in me and that all alternatives lead only to pain and death. Now, peace be with you. God will see you again at the judgement seat to review how well you have obeyed these commands."

Keep on imagining: now you are at the end of your life, standing before the Creator of the Universe, who gave you every good gift you ever received. You must now give an account of how well you stewarded those gifts. After going through everything else, the gift of your children finally comes up, and God gently says, "Your evaluation in this regard has nothing to do with the outcome of your child's life. I was always the one

solely in charge of the outcome. I am only evaluating your love for, your obedience to, and your trust in me—how faithfully did you obeyed my commands as you navigating your journey. How well did you allow yourself to be trained by troubles, to be disciplined by me so that you grew deeper in love with me and more deeply dependent on me alone? How often did you realize that once everything else is stripped away, **I alone was enough**? I know how well you did...but do you?"

### **Purpose beyond Prodigal**

Isn't it interesting that we don't need a map when our destination is clearly in sight? We don't worry too much when the seas are calm, when it is a bright and sunny day, and when there is a gentle, comforting breeze at our back. However, when the waves begin to rock you violently and when you are uncertain if the boat you are in will withstand the forces hammering against the deck, only *then* do you need to clearly know the way to safety.

We may have been taught various strategies to put into place when the storms of life come upon us. We may have had the best and most up to date "guides," and we may have learned from the most experienced "navigators." However, if we do not have confidence and faith in those strategies, those guides, those navigators, then fear will easily overcome us and we will lose our way. Our journey may even end in disaster.

We often default to our human instincts, we follow what seems right to us *in that moment*, we trust in our own abilities, we forget that we are *not* in control, and we forsake our guidebook—our "eternal instruction manual." As finite human beings, there are certain things that we simply cannot control. **Our prodigal situation is one of them!** Proverbs 14:12 sums it up well: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."

The one thing we are promised in this life is trouble. The prodigal journey you are on is just one such trouble. Jesus tells us: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). He graciously gives us both the bad news the good news all in one verse: we *will* have trouble, but *He* is the antidote to all our troubles. Therefore, we would be wise to live for Him alone. *He* is our purpose.

### **Your purpose determines your "witness"**

If your purpose is to glorify God, then you must be aware that everyone around you is watching. People will not follow fear and panic, but they will follow calm confidence in the midst of chaos. As Jeremiah 17:7–8 says, "Blessed is the man who *trusts* in the Lord, whose trust *is* the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it **does not cease to bear fruit.**" If you are driven by security found in money or possessions, not only will the world see it but also you are apt to be devastated when your security is taken away—you will be unsettled and distracted when your security is in jeopardy, when your bank account is in crisis. Furthermore, if your worth and happiness is defined by your prodigal's worldly success—or even *their* security—then your life will wax and wane with them.

So, the central question is: do you know God fully and trust Him enough to obey Him? In his best-selling book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren gives this sobering and challenging statement: "God doesn't owe you an explanation or reason for everything he asks you to do. Understanding can wait, but obedience can't. ... Yet Partial obedience

is disobedience.”<sup>2</sup> We have emphasized throughout this message that our view of God is the most important thing about us. The Prodigal Ministry will continue to point you to God’s Word and God’s people in order to help you further shape your view of God and, thus, to allow you discover and accept God’s intended purpose for you.

If you can come to believe—with every fiber of your being—that **God is good, that He is the one in control, that He loves and cares for you, and that He is enough**, then you won’t miss the amazing opportunity that your prodigal journey has provided you. The lessons you learn throughout your journey will prepare you for the rest of your life. There will be no future trials that will undo you. **You will be a solid rock in any of life’s storm.** You will be able to live according to your God-given purpose and will continually bring Him glory. You will have joy in the midst of *any* circumstance. You will enjoy eternity with God in Christ forever.

“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him”

– John Piper<sup>3</sup>

*The greatest example of someone living with a defined Personal Mission Statement—a defined Purpose—is the life of Jesus Christ. He was a Man on a mission. He had many opportunities to be made King. Satan tempted Him in the desert and offered Him all the world had to offer. The Jews wanted Him to be their King but only to militarily overthrow Roman occupation and to restore Israel to the greatness of the past. Jesus could have had throngs of followers and a pastored a “megachurch”—so to speak—that the world had never seen, replete with miracle after miracle. Instead, he poured into a few followers for three years, he was crucified as the perfect sacrifice for our sins, he was buried for three days, and he was raised back to life so that we might be able to have joy and hope in the midst of this imperfect, painful world and also be able to join Him in paradise forever!*

*Jesus Christ, above all others throughout history, had a clear purpose. He was on mission. Many verses could expound upon and give credence to this fact, such as John 3:16–18 and Philippians 2:6–8, but Hebrews 12:2–3 will suffice: “...Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” You see, we were His purpose. You were His purpose. Now, He is your purpose—for the glory of God!*

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<sup>2</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth am I here for?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 72.

<sup>3</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, revised and expanded (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2003), 10.

## CLOSED GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Day 1

If you were faced with a difficult decision today, how would you process it and decide on the best course of action to take? Please explain in detail.

### Day 2

Describe how your view of God has changed since you began participating in this ministry. Even if your view of God has not changed, what are the three things that you would most want others to know about God?

### Day 3

Does it frustrate you or confuse you that this message states that your “plan” is primarily for *you* and not for your prodigal? How can reminding yourself of your purpose help clarify this statement?

Day 4

How were you challenged by the hypothetical charge that the angel of the Lord had for us concerning our parenting? Do you agree with his perspective? Please explain in detail.

Day 5

Does your personal mission statement (PMS) line up with your checkbook, calendar, relationships, words, and actions? Which one of those categories is most closely aligned with your PMS and in which one there the most room for growth? Please explain in detail.

Day 6

The Prodigal Ministry suggests that your purpose is to glorify God. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Please explain why or why not. Piper states that we glorify God the most when we are most satisfied with Him. How much (or how little) are you satisfied with God? Please explain why.



**NOTES**