

10. Learning to Help People Develop Their Purpose for Life

In our last topic, we talked about how to help people develop a vision for others. Once people have a vision for others, we can begin to help them develop their purpose for life. Before people become Christians, their purpose is centered on the things of this earth. Years ago, I asked a young man who was not a Christian, “What is your purpose in life? His answer was, “My purpose and goal in life is to make money - lots of money.” Today, many people have a similar purpose.

A developing leader, who has developed a vision of what God wants to do in this world, has a new basis on which to develop a purpose for his life. The Christian who has a vision of what God wants to do in the world is now able to ask the question, “How can the Lord use me to help carry out His vision for the world?” That question was never possible before that person became a Christian.

Through the years, I have asked developing leaders a variety of different questions to help them focus on how the Lord wants to use them to carry out the Lord’s vision for the world. Some of those questions include:

- In the job the Lord has given you to supply the needs of your family, in what ways are you able to carry out the vision of doing what the Lord wants to do in the world?
- What things really get you excited as you serve the Lord?
- If you could do anything you wanted for the rest of your life, what would get you most excited in your service for the Lord?
- What is preventing you from doing the things that really get you excited in your service for the Lord?
- How can I serve you and help you become better equipped to do the things that will really make things exciting in your service for the Lord for the rest of your life?

In 2 Timothy 3:10, Paul gives some of the most important things that Timothy had been able to observe in Paul’s life. That verse says, “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance.” One of the things we notice is that Timothy had been able to observe the purpose Paul had for his life. Timothy had been able to see how that purpose motivated Paul in everything he did. That purpose was spelled out both in his relationship to God and in his relationship to the ministry God had laid on his heart.

In Philippians 3:10, Paul describes his purpose in his relationship with Christ, “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” In Romans 15:20-21, Paul describes the purpose that he felt God had given him in life, “And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation, but as it is written: ‘To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand.’” Paul’s purpose in his:

- Relationship to God was to know Christ
- Relationship to ministry was to preach the Gospel where Christ had not been named

However, Barnabas, and later Paul, also helped others develop a purpose for their lives. In Acts

11:23, we read, “When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.” Barnabas realized that all Christians need a purpose at whatever point they are in their spiritual development. The new Christians at Antioch needed to focus on the purpose of heart to continue with the Lord. The word that is translated “continue” is actually a strengthened form of the word “abide” that is used several times in John 15. The new Christians were encouraged to make it their purpose to really abide in Christ. That way they could really get to know Christ and learn to depend on Him. Developing leaders need to be shown how to help new Christians learn to make it their purpose to build their relationship with Christ.

While developing leaders are helping new Christians learn to make it their purpose to build their relationship with Christ, they can be praying that the Lord will give them a passion for an area of ministry in their own lives. They can begin to pray and ask the Lord what purpose He has for them as far as service to the Lord (ministry) is concerned. As the developing leaders pray, the Lord will begin to give them a passion for a particular area of ministry. That passion for that area of ministry will grow as they continue to serve the Lord. In fact, it will often begin to influence their thinking wherever they are. (In my own life, I cannot walk into a mall in another part of the country without thinking, What would it take to plant a church in this area? By the time I leave that mall, I usually have a pretty good idea just from the things that I have observed in that mall.)

Once people begin to realize the passion the Lord has given them, they will realize that doing that type of ministry brings particular joy to their lives. For example, Colossians 4:12-13 tells us that Epaphras had a passion to help the saints in Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis. That caused him to labor fervently for them in his prayers. Philippians 2:30 tells us that Epaphroditus had a passion to serve Paul. In fact, he came close to death just to serve Paul. 1 Corinthians 16:15 tells us that the family of Stephanas had a passion to serve the saints. This passion affected their prayer life, their service, and everything else they did.

Once we know what ministry really gets a developing leader excited in his or her life, then we can serve that developing leader by equipping him to carry out that ministry with increasing effectiveness. In the process, the developing leader will often discover a purpose for life that will allow him to exercise his spiritual gifts, his abilities and will fit his personality. In addition, that purpose will also use his experiences in life to carry out that ministry. We have served this developing leader because we have helped him to recognize his spiritual SHAPE:

S spiritual gifts
H heart or passion
A abilities
P personality
E experiences in life

We also bring joy to the life of the developing leader as we help him find opportunities to exercise his spiritual SHAPE. Every Christian has their joy increased as they begin to see the Lord both working in their lives to help them grow and through their lives as they have the opportunity to serve the Lord. Today, many Christians are not having the opportunity to experience that joy

because no Christian has ever taken the time to serve them and help them discover their spiritual SHAPE and show them how to serve the Lord using that SHAPE.

As Christians discover the unique purpose that the Lord has for them in life, it brings joy and fulfillment to their life. Ephesians 3:20-21 says, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” The Lord is able to do more through any Christian than that Christian can ask for in prayer, or even imagine in his or her thoughts, because it is the power of God that is working through the life of a Christian who is yielding to Him.

God calls us to serve developing Christians and help them discover how the Lord wants to work in and through their lives. What a privilege we have to be able to be used by the Lord to help others experience the joy that Christ wants them to have as He works in and through their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders discover the purpose that God has for their lives.