

On Purpose, 9

S.H.A.P.E. Up

Chapters 29-32; August 10, 2008

POST CONSUMER



We are a nation of consumers. We even hold contests to see just how much one individual is capable of consuming. And we have books and magazines to tell us how to be better and better at consuming. But the sad reality is that the happiness that we experience from *consuming* is short-lived and limited.



Long-lasting, truly satisfying joy doesn't come from *getting* the most for myself ... but *giving* the most of myself!

In this series we've studied three of our created purposes: We were created to believe in something: God. We were created to belong to something: His family. We were created to become like something: His Son.



And today we begin the *fourth* aspect of our created purpose: We were created to bestow something: what I have to offer. I was placed on this planet to pass along what He put inside of me. I was created to contribute to His creation. And He created each of us with a unique set of gifts and talents and abilities expressly for this purpose.

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 NIV*



You may have a poor self-image, but you can't deny that you've been "factory loaded" to offer this world a God-ordained gift that only *you* can give! That's why: When we serve others, we serve God.

However, His highest desire isn't that we serve (Him or anyone) out of guilt or fear, or even a sense of duty or obligation. Scripture is clear that God wants our service to be deeply rooted in joy and gratitude for what He has done for *us*. In the two verses preceding the previous scripture, Paul said:

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 ... - *Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV*

We are not saved *by* works, we are saved *for* works. Our acts of service don't get us *into* Heaven; that comes by "grace" as a "gift of God".

However, the more we comprehend our salvation as a gift of grace (and all that that implies), the more we will *joyfully* desire to extend that grace through the gifts *we* have to give.

As a church staff, we strongly hold the belief that one of our main ways to serve *you* is to equip and encourage *you* to serve. Core value number fourteen in our Membership Manual states:



We strive to equip members to do the work of ministry



All believers experience great joy and fulfillment as they discover, develop, and deploy their God-given gifts and passions in the body of Christ.

In essence, you all have hired *me* to encourage and equip *you* to do the ministering. That's how healthy churches operate.



Otherwise you end up with an NFL church.

That's when a few trained professionals run around (in great need of rest), while being observed by screaming spectators (in great need of exercise)!

Paul makes this point crystal clear to the Ephesians:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, **[WHY?]** to prepare God's people for works of service ... - *Ephesians 4:11-12 NIV*



If you consider yourself one of "God's people" ... You are *expected* to perform "works of service". We're not saved to sit around and wait for heaven! A non-serving Christian is a self-contradiction. If I find that I have *no desire* to serve others - if I'm *only* concerned about my own needs - then I should question whether Christ is really Lord of my life.

Jesus demands that we follow His example.

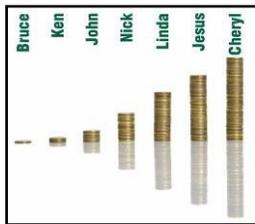
Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant ... just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. - *Matthew 20:26b-28 NIV*



Jesus came to do two things: “to serve” and “to give”. That sums up our fourth created purpose. Christlike hearts desire service over serve-us. But, we have to be intentional about serving. You can practice every day: giving words of support and encouragement, praying for, listening to, and helping others.



Here’s a little exercise you can practice for a week or two: First, decide how many times a day you would like to serve/minister to others in some capacity. Then, place *that* number of dimes in your pocket or purse, or on your desk. And as those dimes catch your attention they’ll remind you to be on the lookout to help out.



Every time you pray for, listen to, help out, or encourage someone, just transfer a dime to another pocket or place. At the end of the day, reset your dimes and talk to God. Now, if you’re not sure how many dimes to start with, I’ve created a chart to help out. You just have to decide who you want to be the most like: Me, Ken, John, Nick, Linda, Jesus, or Cheryl!

Real ministry is *not* a duty-bound-compliance; it’s a satisfying sense of contribution and purpose and Kingdom-involvement. It adds to our lives, substance, impact, and consequence. “Ministry” can be a scary word! But, if you’re a Christian, you *are* a minister, and whenever you serve, you *are* “ministering”. This is one of the ways we can:

... offer [our] bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God ... *Romans 12:1 NIV*



There’s a Danish Proverb that says: “What you are is *God’s* gift to you; what you do with yourself is *your* gift to God.” The question is: How does God want *me* to serve? What exactly is *my* “ministry”?

It’s not a great strategy to randomly select a ministry and try to force yourself to fit. We should take a personal inventory.



You have a specific shape; a unique set of abilities and ambitions, talents and gifts, personality traits and experiences.

By examining these factors that make you uniquely you, you can better identify God’s will for your life of service. S.H.A.P.E. is an acronym to help us accomplish that.



is for *Spiritual Gifts*. This is when inspired desires meet empowered abilities to advance God’s Kingdom. These are the things we wouldn’t have wanted before we knew Jesus, and couldn’t have accomplished without His Spirit.



Like the hot-headed neighbor with a foul mouth who becomes a beloved Sunday school teacher, or the self-absorbed narcissist who is shocked to discover a desire to go to the mission field.

Sometimes when people approach Pastor Nick to go on a mission trip, they'll say, "I don't know why I'm doing this!" And then when they return they say, "When's the next one?!" They've experienced that sacred arena where God's Holy Spirit works in us and with us to advance His Kingdom.

When we see spiritual "fruit", it *is* the result of His involvement; we can't advance His Kingdom without His help.

If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. - *John 15:5 NIV*

Q: What Kingdom desires is God producing in you?



is for *Heart*; our hopes and dreams and ambitions. My "gifts" more reflect God, my "heart" more reflects me. Before we ever know Jesus, God has our hearts wired to *race* when we think about certain subjects and activities and circumstances.

As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man. - *Proverbs 27:19 NIV*

God wants us to serve Him with all our heart (and with passion)! So, He wants us to work within the way we've been wired!

Q: What instinctively, reflexively gets your wheels turning?



is for *Abilities*; these include natural talents you were born with *and* the skills that you've honed. Abilities are an *obvious* indication of how He'll use you.

You might not think you have specific abilities, but I guarantee you have *hidden* ones that just need to be exercised. I have as many muscles as Mr. Universe ... mine are just hiding in there somewhere, and his are well-exercised! If you're just not sure where you fit, consider it worship to experiment and exercise different ministry muscles!

Q: What are your natural abilities and honed skills?



Is for *Personality*. God made introverts and extroverts; He made thinkers and feelers; He made competitors and cooperators. There's no right or wrong categories; just different personalities.

Do you like routine, or do you prefer variety? Would you rather serve on a team, or by yourself? Your unique personality will affect *how* and *where* you use your spiritual gifts and abilities.

Q: What personality traits and behaviors describe you best?



is for *Experiences*: family background, education, vocation, encounters with God, past ministries, and painful events. The interesting thing about experiences is that our greatest ministry usually comes from our greatest hurts and failures (the things the enemy works so hard to convince us to hide).

[God] comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. - 2 Corinthians 1:4 NIV

Who can better help an alcoholic recover, than someone who has fought that “demon” and found freedom?! Who can better comfort a wife whose husband has had an affair, than a woman who has worked through that agony herself?

Don’t waste your pain! The experiences you’ve resented and regretted most are the very ones God wants to use to effectively and powerfully help others.

Q: What catastrophes and corruption from your life could God use?

One key indicator that we’re maturing in Christ, is when we cease to ask, “Who’s going to meet *my* needs?” and start to ask, “Whose needs can *I* meet?” How often do you ask yourself that question?

LIVING ON PURPOSE

If we’re going to live life “on purpose” we must understand:

1. I was created to make a contribution.

Q: What is holding you back?

2. Nobody else can fulfill my role.

Q: What unique abilities and experiences do you have to offer?

3. God always deserves my best effort.

Q: How can you be more intentional about serving?