

# On Purpose, 10

## *Trophies of Grace*

Chapters 33-35; August 31, 2008



In my last message, I said that we are “factory loaded” with God-ordained gifts. And that each one of us is uniquely shaped for ministry (i.e. service) in God’s Kingdom. Caring for others is so integral to your created purpose that whenever you serve *them* you serve *God*. Greatness is measured by service, not status. Even Jesus judges our “greatness” by how many people we serve, and *not* by how many people serve *us*.

When [Jesus] was in the house, he asked [His disciples], “What were you arguing about on the road?” But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the **greatest**. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the **servant of all**.” - *Mark 9:33-35 NIV*



This is so contrary to the world’s idea of greatness that we have a hard time understanding it, much less practicing it! But to be like Jesus is to be a servant. What would Jesus do? Serve! Love, care for, and attend to real needs.

How often do you find yourself taking time to care for or tend to the needs of someone *outside* of your immediate family?



It isn’t a question of how often you “encounter” people with needs; and whether or not you have the “perfect” skill-set to meet them. Needs are all around us all the time. And it takes no special talent to listen or pray or support.

But it does take a special heart – a servant’s heart – to recognize and respond to the opportunities to love God by loving others. Do you have a servant’s heart?

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. - *Galatians 6:10 NIV*



When it rains on a Sunday morning, do you ever think about parking farther away so others don’t have to walk so far? (I’m willing to give you credit for just *thinking* about it!) When you ask a coworker how they’re doing, do you demand an *honest* answer ... or do you dread one?! Do you let busyness rob you of sensitivity to others? Real servants serve when it’s inconvenient.



At the risk of being too blunt, if you only serve when it's convenient for you, you're not a *real* servant. We can miss out on so many God-given opportunities simply because we haven't sharpened our sensitivity and honed our spontaneity. When we see the need we must seize the moment

I've been running this summer (five miles from my house to the top of Burlington Hill and back). A few days ago I decided to time myself, so I ran *extra* hard! Two miles to the hill! Up the hill! Down the hill! The home stretch! And I'm thinking, "You're gonna impress yourself!"

Then a woman along my path waves me to stop, points to a confused older lady walking ahead, and asks if I would walk with her until help arrived. She looked like she knew where she was going! Although, the business suit and purse on a running path seemed a bit odd. I saw the need, but it was still hard to sincerely seize the moment.

But I surrendered my best time ever(!) and walked and visited with her for quite a way. She was a cutie, but very confused. I had to stop her from walking into traffic when a truck passed us with a big dog in it. She said that it was her husband John, coming to get her. I asked if John had a dog. She said, "Nope. But that's just like John to pick up a stray!"

And when I finally got home, turns out I did kinda impress myself; or at least, I was glad about my choice.



How many of you are perfect? That's okay. You don't need to be perfect, but you do need to be ready, willing, and ... faithful. God expects full-time faithfulness.

The Lord will certainly use our strengths and skills to advance His kingdom, but you don't need to have a special gift or talent to serve others. You just need to be available.

But, if we're going to be *real* servants - effective servants - then there's something else we need to be: humble.

[Jesus] **emptied** himself, taking the form of a **servant**, being born in the likeness of men. - *Philippians 2:7 RSV*

You can't be a servant if you're full of yourself! Humility doesn't mean you think *less* of yourself; it just means that you think about yourself ... less ... and others more.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility **consider others better than yourselves**. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. - *Philippians 2:3-4 NIV*

How many of your daily decisions would convince a jury that you consider *yourself* better than others? That's the "selfish ambition" that Paul is talking about.

But he also mentions “vain conceit”. Humility means being open and transparent about our failures. You are a “window” through which God wants others to view Jesus; but pride and vanity (“*vain conceit*”) always obscures the view. The problem is that we don’t like having our imperfections so exposed. So we “pull the shades” on our flaws.



Have you ever looked into a mirror in a restroom that has those cheap florescent lights that reveal every blotch on your face?! I hate those lights! Humility acknowledges the blemishes. Humility understands the value of transparency. It doesn’t deny its strength, it simply acknowledges its weakness. That’s why Paul said:

I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. – 2 Corinthians 12:5 NIV

I’m not quite to the point where I brag about my “pimples”! But the more you let down your guard, and take off your mask, and share your struggles, and let people see who you *really* are, the more God is able to help *you* and to use you to help *others*.

Now, I guess I’m assuming you have faults, flaws, and failures. How many of you have done foolish things, weak things, lowly things that are embarrassing to expose to others? Let’s beat ourselves up a bit. Say, “FOOLISH things, WEAK things, LOWLY things.” Now, pay close attention to this next verse:

God chose the **foolish things** of the world to shame the wise; God chose the **weak things** of the world to shame the strong. He chose the **lowly things** of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. – 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 NIV

He’s drawn to the foolish the weak and the lowly. But, why not the smart the strong and the lofty?! Again, He *does* use our strengths, but not our arrogance; and our foolish, weak, and lowlies actually serve four purposes:



1. Our FWL’s (*foolish, weak, and lowlies*) demonstrate His power.

When God called Gideon to defeat the Midianites, there was a slight problem: Gideon’s army was too strong and too skilled.

The LORD said to Gideon, “You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, announce now to the people, ‘Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.’” So **twenty-two thousand men left** ... – Judges 7:2-3 NIV

That left Gideon with 10,000, which was still too many for God, so He excused another 9,700! And then God led Gideon’s 300 men to defeat 135,000 Midianites. (*Judges 8:10*) Apparently God likes the odds to be 450 to 1 ... against Him!



2. Our FWL’s cause us to depend on Him.

Moses was God's spokesman ... and he was a really poor speaker.

Moses said to the Lord, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." The Lord said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it. - *Exodus 4:10-13 NIV*

When you're God's spokesman, it's easy to get a big head. Moses' handicap kept him (the Israelites & Pharaoh) focused on God's enablement rather than Moses' abilities.



3. Our FWL's encourage other believers.



Vulnerability is such an appealing quality. *My* weaknesses reveal that *you* have value: I need *your* help! *Your* weaknesses reveal that *I* have value: you need *my* help! However, our weaknesses only encourage others when we're open and honest and growing. When you expose your vulnerabilities, people want to cover them with grace and compassion.



4. Our FWL's cause us to embrace His grace.

Paul had a handicap that he called his "thorn in the flesh".

Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, "**My grace is all you need.** My power works best in weakness." - 2 Corinthians 12:8-9a NLT

And from then on, instead of seeing himself as a handicapped Apostle, Paul began to see himself as a trophy of God's grace.



You can impress people from a distance by acting invincible. But if you really want to *influence* them, you're gonna have to get up close and personal, and let 'em see what you really are. You are a trophy of God's grace. That's why Paul said, "If I'm gonna boast, I'm gonna boast about my weaknesses! Because I am a trophy of God's grace!"

If we're going to live life "on purpose" we must understand:

1. I must be ready, willing, and faithful to serve.

Are you honing your sensitivity and spontaneity?

2. I must acknowledge my blemishes.

What do you need to be more willing to expose?

3. I am a trophy of God's grace.

Are you limiting God's power by hiding your faults and flaws?