

Understanding Your Purpose

Os Hillman • Discover Your Purpose

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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

If you are going to discover how God wants to use your life and work, you must know why you were created. If you start trying to determine your purpose in life before understanding why you were created, you will inevitably get hung up on the *things you do* as the basis for fulfillment in your life, which will only lead to frustration and disappointment.

First and foremost, God created you to know Him and to have an intimate relationship with Him. In fact, God says that if a man is going to boast about anything in life, "boast about this: that he understands and knows me" (Jer. 9:24). Mankind's relationship with God was lost in the Garden when Adam and Eve sinned. Jesus' death on the cross, however, allows us to restore this relationship with God and to have an intimate fellowship with Him. The apostle Paul came to understand this when he said, "I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself" (Phil. 3:10, *THE MESSAGE*).

Establishing this relationship with God is vital to understanding your purpose. If you don't have this relationship with God, you will seek to fulfill your purpose out of wrong motives, such as fear, insecurity, pride, money, relationships, guilt or unresolved anger. God's desire is for you to be motivated out of love for Him and to desire to worship Him in all that you do. As you develop your relationship with God, He will begin to reveal His purpose for your life. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord" (Jer. 29:11).

Your purpose in life is chosen by God. It is not negotiable. It is like calling water wet—there is no changing that fact, and there's no changing God's purpose for your life. While you may not *fulfill* the purpose for which you were made, you still *have a purpose* that God intends for you to fulfill. This is your blueprint from God. In the same way that He had a specific purpose in mind for Jesus when He sent Him to the earth, He has a specific purpose in mind for your life.

This doesn't mean, however, that there is one highly specific niche for you to fill and that if you miss it, too bad. It is my belief that you can achieve your purpose in many different and creative ways. This should take the pressure off. You won't throw your entire life off course by choosing the wrong college, job or mate. God is much bigger than any miscalculation or disobedience on your part. "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me" (Ps. 138:8). Isn't that comforting to know?

Defining your purpose will help you to determine the activities that you should be involved in. Like Jesus, you should not involve yourself in activities that contradict His purpose for your existence. Jesus' purpose was to do the will of the Father, and

He never did anything contrary to that purpose. In the same way, your purpose should always be to do the will of the Father.

Several years ago, Henry Blackaby wrote a popular Bible study, *Experiencing God*, in which he described how one of the core principles is to join God where He is already working in order to find His purpose for your life. When you involve yourself in activities contrary to this purpose, you

- I begin to live a life of sweat and toil that leads to slavery instead of reaching the Promised Land of His rest

- I get off course from achieving the intended destiny for your life

- I produce dead works instead of the fruit of obedience rooted in your purpose

- I potentially lose your reward because you are involved in activity God never orchestrated.

Each of us must ask *why* we are involved in an activity. Is it a God-activity, or just a good activity? Remember, Jesus only did something if He saw the Father doing it- and He was able to see what His Father was doing because of His intimate relationship with Him.

Discovering My Purpose

I discovered my purpose late in life. I grew up thinking that my destiny was to be the next Jack Nicklaus.

I started playing golf when I was 11 years old, and my dad encouraged me greatly in this area. I eventually became a very good junior player and even received a golf scholarship to the University of South Carolina. I thought I was well on my way to becoming a professional golfer on the PGA Tour; but when I finished school and turned pro, I quickly grew frustrated and disillusioned with my inability to get to a level to play competitively as a professional.

Our family had always been a church-going family, but we knew little of the concept of walking in a personal relationship with God. However, when I was 14, my dad was killed in an airplane crash, and this accident ultimately led my mom to a more intimate relationship with God. Through her influence and that of a pastor, I became a Christian in 1974.

As the years went by, I decided that golf was no longer the profession I felt God wanted me to be in. I made a career change into sales and marketing, but after being in various jobs for six years, I found myself longing to grow more in the Lord and serve Him in a greater capacity. I was involved in starting a church with two other men who were seeking to be used by God, and this led me to begin thinking about whether I was really "sold out" for God and needed to go to seminary. "Perhaps I am really called to be a pastor," I thought to myself. I decided to take a leave of absence from my job and go to a three-month Bible study course. I then decided to move to Atlanta to serve as an assistant pastor, only to have the position removed after three months. This caused me to go back into the business world. In hindsight, I see that this was the hand of God.

Through it all, I learned that I was never cut out to be a pastor or to have a "vocational ministry"; I was designed to be in business. On the other hand, I could not help but think of myself as a "second-class" Christian who was not quite sold out

to the purposes of God. I don't believe that anyone was saying this to me; it was more implied by the Christian culture around me.

In 2002, I met a woman named Brenda who specialized in working with executives in career transition. She had a keen understanding of how to help people understand their core purpose in life from God's perspective, and she challenged me to go through this process. The goal at the end of the day was to create a five- to seven-word statement that defined my God-given purpose. It took an entire day of tiresome exercises, but in the end we came up with this statement: The purpose for which God made Os Hillman is to *articulate and shepherd foundational ideas for transformation*.

During this process we identified many core strengths that I have, such as teaching, networking, communicating and writing. All of these were attributes of my life, but the core purpose was to articulate and shepherd foundational ideas that could lead to transformation. The interesting thing is that my core purpose had been modeled as a teaching golf professional, a business consultant and an advertising agency owner. I had "articulated and shepherded" ideas in these arenas. Today God is doing it in a spiritual way through writing, mentoring and leading a movement to help people understand their work as a calling.

Understanding Your Anointing

In addition to understanding your purpose, you also need to understand the anointing that is on your life. We read about God's anointing in Scripture: "As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit-just as it has taught you, remain in him" (1 John 2:27).

Anointing is a gift that functions easily when it is operating in you to the benefit of others and the kingdom of God. In his book *Anointing: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, R. T. Kendall explains it this way:

The best way I have been able to describe [an anointing] is that it is when our gift functions easily. It comes with ease. It seems natural. No *working it up* is needed. It is either there or it isn't. If one has to work it up one has probably gone outside one's anointing. If one goes outside one's anointing the result is often fatigue-that is, weariness or spiritual lethargy that has been described as "dying inside."¹

One area in which I have a God-given anointing is networking. I have never sought to develop such an anointing, but I sure know a *lot* of people. Despite being an introvert, God has connected me with people all around the world. Many times people call me about something and my natural response is, "Oh, you need to contact so-and-so. He can help you with that."

My wife, Angie, has an anointing in the area of disarming people. She "unstuffs" people faster than anyone I know. There is no way that you can be a stuffy person around Angie. She is no respecter of persons, either. One of our good friends, a dignified lawyer from Nigeria, does not smile a lot and is quite serious most of the time. As we were leaving a conference one time, Angie noticed him having a serious meeting with three other men in the nearby restaurant. She ran over and gave him a great big, demonstrative kiss on the cheek to say goodbye. He was flabbergasted

and did not know what to do. Later he smiled at Angie and said, "Angie, you are something else!" I have seen people open up to Angie when they will not open up to anyone else. It is her anointing. Everyone is her best friend after a short time.

Where do you move naturally in your life? What do you do that you don't have to work at? Chances are, that is your anointing. God wants you to walk in the anointing He has given to you for His glory.

Being Promoted Beyond Your Anointing

Understanding your anointing will also enable you to know when you are moving in a direction away from that which God has intended for your life. R. T. Kendall explains how many believers often find themselves lured into accepting promotions and assignments outside of their anointing—a concept known as the "Peter Principle":

The way the Peter Principle works is this. A person who has been a first-rate typist or secretary may find themselves in management. As long as they were typing letters, taking dictation, or answering the telephone they were superb. They coped with ease. But a vacancy at a higher level came along and they applied for and got the job. They now have to make hard decisions, handle people under them, and find that they are under stress. They are not cut out for this after all—but try to stick it out. They have been promoted to the level at which they are not able to function with ease. They should have stayed with their old job. But no. They are determined to make it work. Few people will admit they have been promoted to the level of their incompetence.²

I have seen this principle happen a lot over the years. In my ministry, I have some key intercessors who support me personally. One time, I made the decision to put one of these individuals into the role of coordinating prayer for an event because she was an awesome intercessor who had a keen ability to hear God. However, I soon discovered that she was a poor networker and organizer. I had placed her in a role in which her anointing did not lay. That was a good lesson for me.

My Weakness, His Strength

There is a paradox between these two concepts that cannot be ignored. Sometimes, God will place you in situations in which you have no natural gifting. In these cases, God puts you there to experience His power in order to accomplish your tasks. Again, my wife, Angie, is a good example of this. Before she came to work with me full-time, she was a marketing and advertising manager for a non-profit organization. This organization hired a career consulting company to take all their employees through a series of tests to determine if each employee fit into his or her proper job function.

When the results of Angie's test were shared with the rest of her team, her profile revealed that one of her greatest weaknesses was lack of organization and focus. Her boss took exception to the assessment and publicly acknowledged that Angie was the most detailed and organized individual on the entire team. "How could that be true?" he asked.

The consultant said, "Oh, I am glad you asked that. Angie is a perfect example of someone who has overcome her weakness, because even though she recognizes this is her natural bent, she has overcome this by learning to be focused and

detailed." In essence, she had yielded this area to the Holy Spirit and God had worked through her weakness.

I have seen this in my life as well. I am not a natural public speaker. I am generally a shy and reserved person. In a group of people, I will usually be the one to speak the least. But when you give me a topic that I am passionate about, such as helping people find God's calling for their lives, I will talk your head off. I was never one to speak in public, but because the message is more important than my comfort level, God began to empower me to speak publicly about the message He had placed in my heart.

God often moves us beyond our natural gifting and allows us to receive things through our obedience to Him. Oswald Chambers provides some valuable insight on this when he states, "The call of God only becomes clear as we obey, never as we weigh the pros and cons and try to reason it out. The call is God's idea, not our idea; and only on looking back over the path of obedience do we realize what God's idea has been all along."³

Often, God has to get us in a position to accept a call from Him. For many of us, this requires some sort of motivation for us to seek God. More often than not, this motivation comes through some calamity or crisis. When a crisis takes place in our lives, we begin to seek God for relief and answers. Over time, this process encourages us to seek God's face (in a personal relationship) instead of merely His hand of provision.

I believe most of us will experience many jobs and experiences on our way to discovering the purpose or destiny for which God made us. For some of us, that destiny will not be an event or a specific thing, but a process over our lifetime. However, although you may have a similar experience to mine, you also may be someone who starts out in the right place for your calling. The apostle Paul makes an interesting statement that indicates that most of us will remain in the very jobs in which we came to know the Lord. He writes, "Usually a person should keep on with the work he was doing when God called him" (1 Cor. 7:20, *TLB*). God has uniquely gifted you to perform a work in and through the workplace. And in most cases, He wants you to remain in that place to fulfill His purposes through your workplace calling.

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