

I Don't Feel Like My Life Has a Purpose

Ecclesiastes 2:11, 17, Matthew 28:19, Luke 6:47

This week, I realized what a goofy, mixed up dog we have. Dogs have incredible hearing. They can hear things we can't hear. Our little floofy, frou-frou, yappy lap dog can actually hear a cat walking at a hundred feet. But the problem is the dog can't tell whether the cat's walking in the front yard or the back yard. So the dog runs back and forth trying to figure out where it is. It's really a dog without a purpose.

I want to talk about purpose this morning. These are the seven symptoms that we will be addressing:

1. I feel like I'm in this all alone.
2. I don't feel like God cares about me personally
3. I don't feel like I have a purpose—my life feels random.
4. I have destructive behaviors that keep pulling me down.
5. My soul feels dry.
6. My most important relationships are not working. They are not healthy.
7. I don't feel like I'm making a difference in the world.

Today we are up to this one: **I don't feel like my life has a purpose.** That is the title of the message. I don't feel like my life has a purpose.

I was talking to a young man in his teens and he asked me, "What's the point? What is the reason for all of this?" Then I talked to a man in his late 60s who is feeling useless. He feels like he doesn't have a reason to get out of bed in the morning anymore. Whether you are young or you are old, this desire for us to have a purpose for our lives really starts growling when you are young, and it keeps chewing you up until you figure out how to find the purpose of your life God's way.

To tell you about my own experience, I was a religiously curious kid, but in my church nobody picked me up, or took me under their wings, and I floundered. Eventually, this suffocating pointlessness, or this seemingly suffocating pointlessness, got the best of me and I quit high school because I didn't feel like there was any purpose for my life—no reason to exist. Everything seemed random.

When I joined the army I suddenly found a purpose for my life: to serve my country. Then came my discharge papers. Suddenly, my purpose went away and I was right back where I was before—floundering, pointless, no sense of purpose.

Eventually, I decided on a new purpose: to make a lot of money. I began to organize my life around that purpose. I picked selling commercial real estate because that was the biggest thing I could think of that had the biggest commission, so I could make the most money. That is actually how I got into real estate. It's a little embarrassing now, but that is the way it was. My unspoken credo was that money will solve my problems and success will make me happy.

But when I began to achieve those goals (those of you who have ever been in this situation where you are achieving your goals, you know) I found out they eventually just become an unrelated string of hollow victories that become increasingly unable to satisfy this craving for purpose. I had a disease that you have heard me call “success sickness” – the disease of always wanting more but never being happy when you get it.

I started taking out my frustrations on Patsy. This is a key part of my personal faith story. I was taking out my frustrations on Patsy and saying things to her that a man shouldn't say to a woman. One morning I was ranting and she was crying – not unusual at that point in my marriage, I have to say. Again, this is a lot of embarrassment for me. She eventually asked me, “Pat, is there anything about me that you like?” That was the lowest point of my whole life to this day. It began to dawn on me that I needed a higher purpose that could guide my life. I needed a kind of north star in my life. Men, the solution is found in God's Word. I will show that to you this morning. First, I want to show you how the experience that I just described, and your own experience, is the common experience of all men.

In Ecclesiastes, Chapter 2:11, Solomon is describing all of his accomplishments and he says, “Yet, when I surveyed all that my hands had done, and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was wonderful.” Fabulous! Fantastic! Well, that's what people say. How are you doing? Wonderful. How are you doing? Fabulous! Great! Couldn't be better! Every day is a mixture. On some days, things are really, really good. But even on the days that are really, really good, there is still a mixture. There are other things going on, too. You can handle the mixture if you know what God's purpose for your life is. But, if you don't understand God's purpose, then you have the response that Solomon had – everything is meaningless, a chasing after the wind, nothing was gained under the sun. Verse 17 says, “So I hated my life because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

Men tell me all the time that they don't feel like their lives have purpose. I think we can sum it up this way – by saying that as men, we have an urgent need to have a purpose for our life – a reason to exist. To feel like our lives are going somewhere and that our lives are not random. Many men struggle to find this purpose.

My experience is that this frustration tends to be more acute with Christian men – not because they think purpose is not possible, [but] quite the contrary; they are sure that it is possible because that is what the Bible says and that is what they have been taught. Yet, because of the pressure in the Christian culture (How's it going? Praise the Lord! I'm doing so fantastic!), because of the pressure for men to wear game faces, often they do not feel like their life is pursuing a higher purpose, and they don't even know what their purpose is.

Let me tell you how this happens. Men are proud. Is anyone surprised at this? Men come into a Christian culture, a church, a Bible study; you come into a culture like this and the first thing you are trying to do is fit in. You are trying to figure out the culture. What does it take to be successful in this environment? You pick up the phrases that seem to be important to people, and you pick up the persona—the game face—of a Christian who really has it together. But, secretly, often you don't really have it together. The results can be devastating.

I will get to a guy named Mike here in a few minutes that I've been exchanging emails with this week. He didn't come to Christ until the age of 8. His parents were divorced at the age of 11. He went through Sunday school as a boy and learned the books of the Bible but he was never really mentored so at the age of 33, this week, everything came to a head. All of the pretending, this week, got exposed. Now it has a happy ending but this is how it happens. We end up pretending enough to get by and nobody knows the secret angst we have because we don't know what our purpose is. We don't feel like our life is going anywhere. We don't really think Christianity is that powerful. We don't think that Jesus really can transform us.

A friend of mine named Terry came from a middle class family and built a million dollar business. In utter despair, he went into counseling. My problem was that I caught my god. Money was my god. He was in despair. Through counseling he came to understand what his whole new purpose is.

God's Big Holy Audacious Goal for You

We are going to talk about what that new purpose is. I want to talk to you about how God has a Big Holy Audacious Goal for you. I want you to take that in for a minute. Some of you already believe that God has a Big Holy Audacious Goal for you. Others of us want to believe that but that hasn't been our experience, and others of us just kind of [feel] utterly rejected. We even come to these meetings and we think we are talking about some sort of a fiction—some sort of a Grimm's fairy tale every year that doesn't necessarily apply to us.

Where does this term come from? The concept comes out of business. Some researchers studied America's great corporations and they found that the most successful companies in our nation set these shockingly bold goals that inspire fanatical loyalty from employees and customers. Think Apple. These researchers termed this "Big Hairy Audacious Goals." The corporations set Big Hairy Audacious Goals—"B-HAG" for short. We are copying that and converting that into God's Big Holy Audacious Goal. The point this morning is that God has a Big Holy Audacious Goal for your life. I'm about to reveal what it is. But I think I might make you wait just a little longer. No I'm not going to make you wait any longer. **God's Big Holy Audacious Goal for you is to become a disciple of Jesus.** That is God's "B-HAG" for your life.

I want you to stick with me on this because I want you to see how this sometimes overused—often misunderstood—word actually holds the key to you satisfying really all of these God-given needs that you have. Here is the big idea for today: **God has a Big Holy Audacious Goal for your life, the crux of which is for you to become his disciple.** That is what God is doing.

When Jesus invited Peter, James, and John to join him, he invited them to be what? What did he invite them to become? His disciples. Matthew 28:19 is the passage in which Jesus gives us our marching orders. He says go and make what? Disciples. Go and make disciples. From beginning to end, God is working out everything in conformity to the purpose of his will. When you read the Scriptures it is very clear that the portal for all of this is through discipleship.

What's Your Discipleship IQ?

What is your discipleship IQ? Could you right now give what you would consider to be a confident explanation of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus? Around here we have a definition that has three components. It's biblical. Turn to Luke 6:47. This threefold idea of what it means to be a disciple, you see it everywhere in Scripture.

A disciple is called to live in Christ, equipped to live like Christ, and then sent to live for Christ. Calling, equipping, and sending. In Luke 6:47 Jesus is speaking. He says, "I will show you what he's like who comes to me." That is the calling. He goes on, "And hears my words." That's the equipping. "And puts them into practice." That's the sending. You see the same thing in 2 Timothy 3:15-17 where it talks about the Scriptures making us wise for salvation. That is the calling. In Verse 16, all Scripture is inspired by God for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness. So there is the equipping. Verse 17 says, "So that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." That is part of the sending. You see this everywhere in Scripture, this calling, equipping, and sending. That is what it means to be a disciple.

Guys, listen. You are not primarily a businessman or a forklift operator or a lawyer or a husband or a father who happens to then also become a disciple. The idea is that you are a disciple, and out of the overflow of that, you do everything else that you do. Luke 14 says if anyone will come after me he must take up his cross, deny himself and follow me, and if you don't do that, you can't be my disciple. This becoming a disciple is the purpose of life and then we decide how to be mentored in business, driving a forklift, as a husband, as a father. That's it. **God has this Big Holy Audacious Goal for you, the crux of which is to become a disciple of Jesus.** Listen, every other purpose that you pursue that doesn't flow out of this is going to eventually lead to this feeling of being useless. I wish you could walk in my shoes for one week and hear the stories of the men—young and old—who feel like their lives are headed nowhere and they are very much like this young guy Mike that I was just mentioning.

Getting Serious About Discipleship

How do you get serious about discipleship? Let me tell you a little bit about Mike. Mike is a contractor in Iraq. He is 33 years of age, married, with one son from a former marriage who lives with them. Mike lives in northeast Alabama. His parents divorced when he was 11. They were in church every time the doors opened but a very different man appeared as soon as they left church. His father physically and verbally abused his mother, and by the age of 11, she couldn't take it anymore so she bailed out. Her self-esteem was so shattered that she jumped right back into another marriage to a man very much the same. He made the decision as soon as he could that he was outta there and he was. I asked Mike this week – look, I asked him a bunch of questions because he is at a turning point. He feels like his life has no purpose at the age of 33. I asked him to tell me about his relationship with God. I asked him if he was a Bible reader. In a previous email, he was putting on the game face that he had been reading his Bible. He just started reading his Bible for two months and that was sporadic. I asked him if he had a best friend or if he was in a small group. He said no. To be honest, he doesn't really have any friends. That is part of the problem. He feels like he is all alone, that he has to figure this out all himself. He doesn't have any mentors, he doesn't have anyone to talk to, and he's always been a loner. I said, "Tell me about your church life." He said honestly that for the last four years he hadn't been connected in the

church community. You see where this is going? How can you really grasp God's purpose for you and grow in it when you are not involved in the things that would help you become... If God's Big Holy Audacious Goal is for us to become disciples, and we are not doing anything, you can see how that becomes a downward spiral.

Interestingly enough, I probably shouldn't have done this, but I sent Mike a copy of this book *Man Alive*. It's been unbelievable the last couple of days what has happened to Mike. God is totally turning his life upside down. He made the comment, "I feel like I am a glass bottle that has been completely shattered and now the glass is being reblown." I even got an email from him about an hour before I left to come here this morning. I will read it to you.

"As I said yesterday, I've always known of God but I've never really taken time to know God. So I began to pray and talk to Him. I just poured my heart out and finally said these words." So he said these words about two hours ago. "'Father, I know you are there. But I just want to feel you for a second. I would just like a hug in my soul.' It was in this moment that I heard a voice in my heart tell me to read John 13:6 and following." That's where Jesus has this exchange with Peter about washing Peter's feet. "I hit my knees and started to cry. I felt like God had just wrapped his arms around me and told me how much he really loved me. For the first time in a long time, I don't feel alone anymore."

This is a benefit of becoming a disciple, of entering into our purpose; we don't feel like we are a man caught between two worlds. He's getting serious about discipleship and so can you.

One thing that I'm getting a little hot on right now is life-on-life mentoring. This last week I agreed to mentor a 27-year-old, young businessman. I talked to several other young guys recently and I've asked them, "Would you like to have a spiritually mature guy who could be a mentor to you—not a Bible teacher to you, but just a life-on-life mentor to you?" You know what's happening? Every one of them can barely constrain themselves, they are so excited about the idea. Do you realize what a treasure we have in our young men that are out there today? How much potential they have and how much they yearn to know Christ and live for God? So I would just say that for those of you who want to get serious about your discipleship and need a mentor, then ask somebody to be your mentor. For those of you who are far enough along that you could be a mentor, make yourself available.

I'm going to try to facilitate this and see if this wants to work here, because I have poured my life [into discipleship]—and I know your pastors and others and your table leaders have; you have been poured into with discipleship. Guess what? If you know everything that's been said this morning, then guess what? It is time for you to step up and step out. It's time for you to take this powerful knowledge that God entrusted to you and to spread it out. One way to do that is to agree to mentor another young guy.

Let me tell you what my dream is. This is not on *Man Alive* anymore now. My dream is that we would add—net—one man per week, between now and the end of next year, to the live Bible study and they would all be 35 years of age or younger. We need mature guys. We have enough mature guys. We also need young guys and they need you. We have a lot of young guys that are starting to come to the Bible study and that's great. I'd like to accelerate that. How many of you would be willing to meet with a

young guy to do life-on-life mentoring? If you would be, raise your hand. Look what a resource pool we have for young guys here. We are going to jump on that!

That's a great way to get serious about your discipleship—to get mentored or be a mentor. You can do with a guy like Mike what I've been able to help him with. The big idea here: **God has a Big Holy Audacious Goal for your life—the crux of which is to become his disciple.**

Let's Pray:

Lord Jesus, thank you so much for discipleship and just the privilege you have given us to actually enter into this relationship with you, and how you do meet our deepest needs as we become disciples. Lord, for any of us who have become ho-hum on discipleship, I pray you would stir us up a lot, and for those of us who really need to know the purpose of our life, that you would confirm in our hearts that the purpose of our life is not to make a lot of money, it's not to serve our country, it's not even to be a good husband and father. Those are secondary things, but the real crux of the matter is to become your disciple and follow you – to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and follow you. We ask you to confirm this in our hearts, in Jesus' name. Amen.