

# “I Don’t Feel Like I’m Doing Anything That Will Make a Difference”

*John 15:8, Ephesians 2:8-10, Acts 17:26, Colossians 3:23-24,  
1 Corinthians 7:20, 12:4-7, 1 Peter 4:11, Zechariah 4:6*

Good morning, men. I’ve been doing this for a long time. I was thinking this week how much I enjoy teaching the Bible and I wanted to say thank you to you all for being part of this Bible study. I really appreciate you and it is an investment by you, so thank you for being a part of the Bible study.

We’re wrapping up the Man Alive series this morning; this is the eighth one. The first one was an introduction. We’re looking at seven primal needs men have. We started by saying that when men try to describe what is holding them back, what is keeping them from feeling fully alive, they—in my experience—mention or try to mention one of seven symptoms, and each of these symptoms corresponds to one of these primal God-given needs that He’s built into us. He’s wired us to help motivate us to become the men that God created us to be. No man should settle for half alive.

The seven symptoms again, for the final time, are...

- First, I just feel like I am in the middle of this thing alone.
- Secondly, I don’t feel like God cares about me personally. By the way, that’s what the little booklet is about, *Becoming a Man Alive*.
- I don’t feel like my life has purpose. It feels like things are random.
- I have these destructive behaviors that keep dragging me down.
- My soul feels dry.
- Many of the most important relationships – they are not helping; they aren’t working.
- And finally, number seven, for today: I just don’t feel like I am doing anything that is making a difference and that is leaving the world a better place.

## THE PRIMAL NEED

Let’s talk about the primal need itself. Bill has been out of work for over a year and is having [a tough time] making ends meet. But he doesn’t just want to jump into anything because he feels like God has made him to make a difference and he doesn’t want to settle so he’s holding out for a job where he can feel like he’s fulfilling God’s destiny for him so he can make a difference.

All the way at the other end of the spectrum is Steve. Steve is at the zenith of his career. He said, “I have a fantastic job, a beautiful luxury home, a perfect wife, these excellent kids, and recently I deposited a check for \$100,000 into my bank account.” He said, “My wife and I, that evening, had a drink to celebrate, but I found that I was downcast. My wife said to me, ‘What’s the matter? What do you want?’” He said, “I looked at her and said, ‘I just don’t know. I just don’t know.’”

Whether you're just trying to survive, or you are feeling the emptiness of mere success, every single one of us has been wired by God with a craving – a craving. All of us have this craving. This craving is not for mere prestige or power or winning the admiration of others; those are the illusions of youth. This craving is not merely for financial stability or providing for our families, as important as that is. This craving is deeply felt. I would describe this primal need this way – I would say that as men, we have a powerful, innate deep need for significance. That our lives would count. That it would matter that we have walked across the face of the earth and that our lives would make a difference.

The problem is, in the rush of our lives, often this deeply felt need is misguided or ignored altogether. It starts when you're young like a tropical storm. Then the intensity of this desire, this craving, this need, actually intensifies until it becomes a Category 5 hurricane at midlife and it never goes away. It's one of the primary determiners of whether or not you will be a happy man in your life – whether or not you are leading a life of significance.

Now I have some good news. In the words of Steve Jobs, you were created by God to make a dent in the universe – every single one of us. Every single one of you. God has a special plan to do that. The big idea which talks about this special plan is this: **The big idea for the week is God has a specific plan for your life as unique as your fingerprints.** I'm going to prove that to you and show you how you can figure out and live out that plan.

## THE GENERAL PLAN

We're going to start. Let's find out how this happens. Turn to John 15:8. Let's look at the general plan God has for all men and then we'll look at the specific plan God has for you. John 15:8 – Jesus says, “This is to my Father's glory--” Just like to pause there and talk about the glory of God. I'm going to give away the end of the message. The end of the message is this: It is when we turn our lives to—instead of bringing glory to ourselves, instead we live for the glory of God, and we see God's glory as the ultimate objective of how we... When we do things for the glory of God, this is when we will feel truly significant. Here's the secret of significance: You will never feel fully significant alive or happy until you are doing exactly what God wants you to do. I'll show you exactly what God wants you to do in just a moment. John 15:8: “This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit--” God wants us to bear fruit. Now, does God have a performance-based culture where you have to do something in order to be good enough to earn God's favor? No. We'll look at that in a moment in Ephesians, Chapter 2, but for now God does want you to lead a productive life. “This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

We started out by saying that the way you don't feel alone is becoming a part of community and digging into God's Word, and then we looked at how God loves us and the response to that is to become a disciple, which is the purpose of our lives. And then there are four messages for how we flesh out what it means to be a disciple. First is to remove the negative things that are dragging us down and holding us back, and then, yes, God loves us, but our response is that we love God, the first commandment – when the soul is dry, the first commandment is to love God with everything that is within us. And the second commandment, which we looked at the last time, is to love other people – neighbor love; cut the Bible

and it bleeds neighbor love. And today we are looking at what we do for God—how we bear fruit—and we do that through the Great Commission, making disciples. [And we do *that*] through what is called the cultural mandate, which is working, providing for our families, being citizens, doing volunteer work, [etc]. So the vertical world is loving God and the horizontal world is loving other people – Great Commission (making disciples), and cultural mandate (taking care of the culture). So we've been unpacking these things, trying to make them a little more interesting than the normal way you might think about them, but that is the essence of what's going on here.

When we bear fruit, we show the work of a disciple so it is one way we work out what it means to be a disciple.

Turn to Ephesians. 2:8 says, "For it is by grace--" That means it is initiated by God. "--you have been saved--" Something that God initiated but we had a part. "It's by grace you've been saved, through faith--" That's what we did to respond. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." So we're saved by faith, not works. But let me just tell you this is an incomplete understanding; it is not a full, full-orbed theology because of Verse 10. Look at Verse 10. Verse 10 says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works..." When you hear "saved by faith, not works," it really should be saved by faith, not by works, but *for* works. You see? It's by faith, not works, *for* works. You see? It's right there. We have been created for works. We've been saved not by works; we've been saved by *faith*, but we've been created to do good deeds, to bear much fruit, showing ourselves to be His disciples for God's glory.

## A SPECIFIC PLAN

We'll look at another verse that relates to that soon. Notice the last phrase, "--which God prepared in advance for us to do." **God has a specific plan for your life as unique as your fingerprint.** The idea is that you're not off the rack. You're not machine produced; you're custom made; you're a one-of-a-kind masterpiece. You're not a lithograph that's been reproduced with 1000 copies; you are a Rembrandt. You're unique. You're God's masterpiece; there is no other person like you. God must have so much fun. Now there are 7 billion people now alive in the world today, and can you imagine? You would think that God would have to have a factory to make 7 billion people, but He doesn't. He has a studio, and He created each one of these 7 billion people – each one of us, you and me; He took his time in His studio and created. When He was done, He didn't finish until He said, "Ahhh... another masterpiece." That's what you are. That's what the Bible says from beginning to end – that you are God's one-of-a-kind masterpiece. It says it right there. It says it everywhere, but it says it right here (Verse 10) – for you are God's workmanship, masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works prepared in advance for you to do... a specific plan.

Turn to Acts 17:26. Let me tell you why I'm spending so much time on the Scriptures. The Word of God has power—convincing, persuasive power—so I don't want you to hear me reinterpreting the Bible to you and saying things of my own words so you think it's Pat that you should be listening to. It's not Pat you should be listening to. I pray every week that God would make sure you'd forget the things I've messed up. But the Word of God does not mess up. It has this... "It is not by might or power, but by my

Spirit” says the Word of God (Zech. 4:6). The Word of God has a *dunamis*, a power. The reason I spend more time on this, as you’ll see in a moment, is I think we have a big problem in this area of how we figure out how to make a difference. What I want you to do is believe the Word of God. I want you to believe that you really are special and that **God really does have a specific plan for you and that it is as unique as your fingerprints**. I want you to believe what that plan is. I’m getting way ahead of myself now. It is not just a plan to go and win people to Jesus, as unbelievably valuable as that is, but God’s specific plan for your life includes every single thing you’ll do today. Every part of your life comes under the dominion of God.

Acts 17. Just to show you how He stamps His authority on His masterpieces, Acts 17:26: “For from one man, he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth,” and here’s what I want you to see, “and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.” Are you homeless? God has determined the exact places you should live, now and later. Unbelievable amount of Scriptures... God is micromanaging his universe. He is not a hands-off clockmaker who built the clock, wound it up, and is now taking a nap. He is a micromanager and he’s interested in the details of our lives. The details of our lives.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 12. Now this is one of the ways that God micromanages; Verse 4 is where we’ll start. This is one of the ways God micromanages your life – this masterpiece He’s created, this one-of-a-kind, tailor-made, custom-made person that you are. He gives you gifts. Yes, it’s to the Father’s glory to bear much fruit, to show yourself as a disciple, and one of the ways you bear much fruit is He gives each of us gifts – spiritual gifts. In Verse 4 in 1 Corinthians 12, “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. Different kinds of service, same Lord. Different kinds of working, same God. Now to each one of us, each one of you and me, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one, there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom...” and the next several verses give a number of these different spiritual gifts.

On your tables is a worksheet for you to develop a personal life mission statement. On one of the questions that you can answer is the question, *What are your spiritual gifts?* And there are four Bible verses that explain what the spiritual gifts are for. I put the addresses of those scriptures in the question so you could look up those questions and evaluate what your gifts are the way that God has uniquely made you—this gift of the Spirit—so you can bear much fruit, because **God has a specific plan for your life and it’s as unique as your finger print**.

I’m going to run out of time again. A few things more I want to say... Most of our time will be spent not in the Great Commission – although all of our time is in some sense spent in the Great Commission. But as a practical matter, most of our time is going to be spent doing the cultural mandate. For example, your work. Your work takes up 50% of your waking hours if you include commuting and getting ready for work; half your entire life is spent working. That is taking care of God’s creation so that is cultural mandate. What is the rest of your waking hours spent on? Your family or maybe you have a wife or a girlfriend that you have yet to meet—those relational needs—or you have some kind of a recreational activity that you’re involved in, maybe some volunteerism in the community, maybe a little time to relax

at the end of a long day. Those things are not building the Kingdom per se but they are definitely spiritual.

So we have these two ways that God has created for us to make a mark and leave the world a better place – the Great Commission and the cultural mandate; both are spiritual. This is so unbelievably huge because this is where a lot of men break down and don't feel like they are doing anything significant for the glory of God, because they don't think their work really matters, that their secular life really matters, but in the eyes, mind and heart of God, there is no such thing as secular. Every vocation is totally to the Lord. And your work is not just a platform to do ministry; it is ministry.

I've told this story—I can't tell it enough—about the young math teacher that came here one day to visit the Bible study. Over at the first-timers table, he was introducing himself. He said, "All of my life, all I ever wanted to do was teach high school math and now I do. But I found that my kids were coming to class with problems that math can't solve. I found that the Christian teachers in my school didn't know each other. God put in my heart a vision"—a plan, a specific plan, if I could paraphrase— "of how to try to address those two needs." Then Tim said something I will never forget. He said, "I'm an ordained math teacher."

Whatever it is that you are doing, you are ordained by God; in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, you are now ordained. You are now ordained, okay... So if you are a delivery man, you are an ordained delivery man bringing essential supplies to your customers so the world of commerce can go on. If you are a farmer, you are an ordained farmer, growing needed food so parents can feed their children. If you're a landscape maintenance worker, you are an ordained landscape worker who is creating and maintaining beauty that soothes weary souls at the end of the day so that life can go on.

You get the idea. Whatever it is you have been ordained to, do it. If you're fixing computers and you think you are fixing computers to make money to do the things you really want to do, listen – fixing computers is really important. Being a plumber is really important. Doing auto mechanics is really important. Fixing teeth is really important. Fixing refrigerators is something that is really important. Those are five things that I had to have taken care of when I was in the process of writing this book.

I told you about fixing the refrigerator thing – that was when I paid \$60 to the guy to come out. "What's wrong?" To which he said, "You just need to replace the light bulb in the refrigerator." I'm still smarting over that one. I don't think he was ordained to charge me \$60. I think he was ordained, but I don't think he was *that* ordained.

This idea that you would have to go into fulltime ministry – listen, I don't have time to look it up; it is on your sheet: 1 Corinthians 7:20. Paul says you should remain in the position you were in when you first believed. For 99% of us, we are not going to go into fulltime Christian ministry or, if you want to play with words, you already are in fulltime Christian ministry it's just that you are not going to be doing ministry as a vocation; you'll be doing something else.

We'll wrap up with this story. One of our table leaders started teaching a young couples' class and it began to grow like a weed. He said it was the most profound time of growth in his life and his family

benefitted greatly. Many assumed he would go into fulltime Christian ministry, because he wanted to continue to grow, so he did. He came to work for Man in the Mirror. And then pretty soon, he started hearing this teaching that every vocation is holy to the Lord, and he also started really missing the project management job he had before – meeting the deadlines and guiding these projects through to completion. And he actually felt less significant and less alive working in a ministry than he had felt when he was out in the general work market. When he finally grasped all of this, we talked about it and he contacted his old employer, who welcomed him back with open arms. He said, “My personal growth took such a hit by going into fulltime ministry. I’m just now starting to recover.”

Take this worksheet. I want to—as strongly as I can as we complete this series—encourage you to take some time maybe over the weekend and go through this. See where it takes you. You might find you get right through it – bam! You might already know exactly what this specific plan is; praise God. Or you might be at the cusp of it and it might be enough to push you over the edge and you’ll finish this weekend. For some you might need to pray about this; it might take months. It depends on how in tune you have been with this up to this point. I want to encourage you in a big way to do that.

Now the coup de grâce, 1 Peter 4:11, and then we’ll close. (Anytime a preacher or teacher says, “We’re almost done,” it means he knows he’s gone over.) 1 Peter 4:11. So this by the way is one of the passages on spiritual gifts. It says, “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength that God provides,”—this is the part I want us to see—“so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever.” Significance. Authentic significance is found bearing much fruit in a way that brings glory to God. Unto You, o God, be all the glory. **The big idea: God has a specific plan for your life as unique as your fingerprints.**

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Let’s pray.

Our great God, our dearest Father, Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, thank you for the series that we have just gone through. Lord, we pray—each of us pray—that you would tutor to our hearts the message that you have for us today – whether it’s something that has been spoken from the front, something that would be heard in discussion or an altogether spate thought that your Spirit introduces into our lives and hearts. Change us, Lord. Transform us. Help us to be fully alive, to lead lives of true significance, bearing much fruit and bringing you glory. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.