

## Life Purpose and Identity

Puzzles can be fun – at least when you can solve them! But when we can't figure them out or understand them, puzzles can make us feel frustrated or even angry. Understanding and navigating life's challenges is probably the most confusing puzzle of all.

God has placed a dream in your heart: that your life is meant to have meaning and purpose, and that all your efforts should lead to a deep sense of personal fulfillment. This is not a selfish desire to be suppressed; it is a God-given dream and one of the primary purposes of Jesus' earthly ministry.

*"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that [you] may have life, and have it to the full."* – John 10:10 (NIV)

A "full life" is what Jesus wants for you. Jesus sacrificed His life so you can have a deeply fulfilling, meaningful, and purposeful life. But this doesn't happen automatically. You play a vital role in bringing your God-given destiny to life.

Most of our lives are filled with constant busyness. We stay busy meeting daily needs, checking off to-do lists, interacting with others, moving from one place to another, and tending to our own or others' physical needs. This nonstop activity often leaves us feeling exhausted and drained. What we often lack is a sense of meaning and purpose. And that's because our days have not been centered on God's priorities. We too often fail to invite God to "guide" and "direct" our lives. We must create "space" for that to happen because God only enters when we make room for Him. God waits for our invitation.

When I retired from teaching and pastoring, I had a lot of time for personal reflection and prayerful thought. One of the main topics I reflected on was God's purposes – not just for me, but for all His children. What came out of my reflections was the following:

**The purpose of life is to know God and follow His guidance, becoming the person He created you to be, and doing the good works He has ordained for you.**

There are four distinct aspects involved in discovering your identity and fulfilling your true purpose in life: 1) Knowing God; 2) Following His Guidance; 3) Becoming the Person God Created You to Be; and 4) Doing the Good Works God has Ordained for You. Let me explain each of these in more detail.

## Knowing God

In the “High Priestly Prayer,” Jesus says, “*Now this is eternal life: that they **know you**, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*” – John 17:3 (NIV)

Many believe that simply trusting in Jesus and asking Him to forgive your sins is enough. Doing this makes you a citizen of the Kingdom of God and grants the promise of eternal life. However, this alone doesn’t transform your life here on earth. God desires much more for you now! He wants you to experience the “full life,” which comes through developing a close, personal relationship with Him. A key part of any genuine relationship is getting to know the other person on a deeply personal level.

Scripture frequently gives descriptions of God’s character. A few are listed in Exodus 34:6:

*“The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in faithfulness and truth.”* – Exodus 34:6 (NASB).

A complete list of all God’s attributes would be long, but you need to understand that you should not only have intellectual knowledge of God’s attributes; you must also **experience them in a profoundly personal way**. You need to experience God’s mercy, His forgiveness, His acceptance, and His peace. You need to experience all of God’s attributes as you interact with Him. That’s what it means to “know” God – to genuinely enjoy a personal relationship with Him.

But **experiential knowledge** only comes from personal interactions with God. These can happen naturally as you share your honest thoughts and feelings with God throughout the day. The only way to truly know God is by spending time with Him, engaging in open, honest, and humble communication – speaking to Him from our hearts, and letting Him ‘speak’ to us. We each need to build this “space” into our lives.

And practicing frequent connections with God throughout the day leads to the second part of discovering and realizing your true life purpose.

## Following God’s Guidance

*“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.”* – Psalm 32:8 (NIV)

*“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’”* – Isaiah 30:21 (NIV)



The Bible often emphasizes the importance of prayer. Many people think prayer is just talking to God – mainly asking or telling Him what you want or need. That’s okay, but prayer is meant to be much more than that.

Prayer, at its most basic level, is simply communicating with God. And that communication is meant to be two-way: you speaking to God while He listens, and then God speaking to you while you listen.

But the “speaking” that transpires between the two of you should go beyond simple words. God desires for you to express your feelings and attitudes, even if they are outbursts of anger or other strong emotions. And God’s “speaking” to you can also be non-verbal. God often desires to “minister” to you. He desires to give you grace, mercy, strength, peace, wisdom, and a myriad of other blessings.

It is mainly through these times of reflective, personal interaction with God that we develop experiential knowledge of Him, as well as God’s personalized guidance on how to respond to the challenges we face in life. King David reveals an essential aspect of our interactions with God in Psalm 51:6.

*"Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom." – Psalm 51:6 (NASB)*

David understood the importance of connecting with God in a sincere and personal way. He learned the value of solitude and silence during his years as a shepherd, which ultimately helped him become “a person after God’s Own heart.” Practicing sincere, reflective interactions with God during quiet moments is what led David to fulfill his destiny as King of Israel. This same practice can also help you discover and achieve your true life purpose. Ask God to help you grow in your ability to be genuinely open and honest in your interactions with Him throughout your day.

Because God is purposeful and intentional, our personal interactions with Him will lead us to the third aspect of discovering our true life purpose.

## **Becoming the Person God Created You to Be**

In Acts 20:24, the Apostle Paul makes the following statement:

*“My life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus...” – Acts 20:24, (NLT)*

I will talk more about doing the work God has specifically called you to do a bit later, but for now, consider the first part of Paul’s statement. When Paul said, “My life is worth nothing to me unless ...,” he understood that the primary purpose of his life was

to know God and follow God's guidance. His personal identity was directly connected to his willingness to surrender to God's leadership. The same is true for each of us! Our self-worth is intricately woven into becoming the person God created us to be.

**Romans 8:** <sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. (NIV)

Being "conformed to the image" of Jesus refers, in large part, to our integrity and character development. But that will look slightly different for each of us, and will only occur as we seek to follow God's guidance. In the first part of Jeremiah 1:5, God says"

*"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you..."* – Jeremiah 1:5 (NIV)

God "knew you" before He "formed you" in your mother's womb. God had a picture of an "ideal you" and then "formed you" to fulfill that image! God created you for a unique life purpose, but your purpose isn't just about what you do. Your life purpose is also very much tied to the person you become.

God created you with a unique set of attributes – personality, temperament, skills, interests, intellectual capacity, motivations, and more. Each of these attributes has its own personalized "settings" that are specific to you. Have you ever seen a soundboard, like the ones used for adjusting sound quality at a concert or speaking event? (Photo?) It's filled with dozens of slides and switches, each modifying a different aspect of the sound. Similarly, God assigned a unique setting to each of your personal attributes. Some of your attributes are fixed – like male or female. Others are variable – like how much of an introvert or extrovert you are. But even for variable attributes, God designed you to stay within a given range. Our task is to discover who God created us to become and then follow His guidance into becoming that person.

But we face two challenges. First, the influence of sin in the world has corrupted God's plans for many of your attributes. Second, the "world" tries to convince you that there are some "standards" you are supposed to conform to. There is no one person you are meant to become; you're not even supposed to be exactly like Jesus! Certainly, there are many aspects of Jesus' character that we wish to emulate in our lives, but Jesus was a unique individual. ***There is no "ideal" person you are supposed to imitate, but there is an "ideal" you.*** And it is your responsibility to follow God's guidance in aligning each of your personal attributes with their "God-assigned" values.

Through your personal interactions with God, He wants you to see clearly who you are now and who He created you to become. And through your relationship with Him, God will guide you to become the person you were meant to be.

Let's revisit Paul's statement in Acts 20:24: "My life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus..." The second part of his statement leads to my final point. The fourth aspect of discovering and fulfilling your true life purpose is to focus on:

## Doing the Good Works God Ordained for You

Ephesians 2:10 reinforces that point:

*"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do". – Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)*

I like the term "handiwork"! God is personally and uniquely crafting each of us as a special project! In addition to modifying all of our personal attributes, part of that crafting includes some specifically ordained "good works" for each of us to accomplish. These "good works" aren't necessary to earn our salvation; they are part of living out the person God created you to become.

The 2nd part of Jeremiah 1:5 adds further insight: "... And before you were born I set you apart."

Some versions of the Bible use the word "consecrated" instead of the phrase "set you apart." To be consecrated means to be "solemnly dedicated for a high purpose." That high purpose is tied to advancing God's Kingdom here on earth. God has prepared special works for you to do, and part of your purpose in life is to discover God's unique plans for your life.

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." – Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)*

And how can you discover God's plans for your life? You ask Him, wait for His guidance, and then do your best to follow it.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; <sup>6</sup> in all your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5 – (NIV)*

This 3-step process is the heartbeat of the Christian life.

1. Ask God what He wants you to do.
2. Wait for God's response.
3. Follow through to the best of your ability.



If you don't remember anything else, remember this: if you seek God's will, He will guide you in ways that help you discover who He is, who He wants you to become, and what good works He desires for you to do. Not only that, but He will also provide all the resources you need along the way. That is how you will discover and fulfill God's purpose for your life.

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If this discussion has been helpful, I'd like to let you know about a book I've written that explores this and other closely related topics in greater depth. The title of the book is: "Finding Meaning, Purpose, and Fulfillment: Making Sense of God, Life, and Success."

My goal in writing this book was to help people better understand how God designed life to be lived and what He expects from each of us. In its broadest sense, God designed life as a journey of discovery with Himself as our guide, counselor, and primary resource. You and I are called to be students of life with God as our teacher!

If you didn't enjoy going to school, let me assure you that having God as your life teacher will be substantially better than any previous educational experiences. God is not angry with you, He is not disappointed in you, and He will never pressure or embarrass you. He is genuinely a kind, loving, and supportive teacher – more so than any teacher, coach, counselor, or parent you have ever known. A big part of your life as a student is discovering how truly awesome God is!

My book highlights the most important life principles God has established, guides readers in building and deepening their relationship with Him, and outlines ways to adjust their life practices to further God's purposes in and through their lives. ***In short, my book addresses one central question: What is life really all about?***

Each of us recognizes that we are responsible for how we live our lives. We each must find answers to the most profound and important questions of life. But what are the most critical questions for which we must find answers?

As I reflected on my life experiences in the months leading up to my retirement from teaching and pastoring, the Holy Spirit helped me realize that everything of value I had ever learned was an answer to one or more of four questions. In my book, I refer to these as the "Four Essential Life Questions."

1. Who Is God?
2. How Has God Designed Life to be Lived?
3. Who Am I?
4. What Is God Asking Me to Do?

My definition of life purpose, which I discussed earlier, was developed after finishing my manuscript and aligns closely with these four questions. ***What profoundly impacted me was the realization that as I have found answers to these Essential Questions over time, and followed God's guidance to bring my life into alignment, meaning, purpose, and fulfillment have grown in my life.*** I believe that is how God wants to bring meaning, purpose, and fulfillment into your life as well.

Who Is God?

How has God  
Designed Life to  
be Lived?

Who Am I?

What is God  
Calling Me to  
Do?

The Essential Questions serve as containers. The more you fill these containers with answers and align your life accordingly, the more meaning, purpose, and fulfillment will grow. You will experience the “full life” Jesus died to secure for you as you allow God to reveal answers to the Essential Questions and then follow His guidance. The book also provides detailed guidance on how to incorporate the Essential Questions into your daily life.