

Distinctives: purpose found in Christ

Isaiah Michael Rayel explores grace and service





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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. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

The worship ministry leader at my Church has an anointing on her singing voice. When she sings, God's presence can be felt, inspiring people to sing, dance, cry, and even bringing them to their knees. Towards the end of her songs, she is often moved to tears herself by the overwhelming presence of God. It is evident, both to believers and unbelievers, that she has a God-given talent which she uses to bring people into an awareness of God's presence. In my own life I have sometimes felt envious of other believers who are so confident of God's gifting and plan for them. Unlike the worship ministry leader at my Church, some talents are not as obvious as hers. But this does not denigrate the importance of each person's own God-given talents and purpose.

sacrifice & grace

As explained in Ephesians 2:10, each person is the work of God's hand, and we all have our roles for the advancement of God's kingdom. As a believer in Christ Jesus, fulfillment comes from following God. Once we accept Jesus as our Lord we live by a new standard, we no longer see the world through the lens of man. Our past does not define us anymore and all guilt and shame are cleansed through the blood of Jesus. Nevertheless, there is a sacrifice in denying one's flesh and the world's temptations to follow Jesus.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it." (Matthew 16:24-25)

We no longer live for ourselves but live for God. To those outside of the Christian faith, we may look deprived of some enjoyments of life. This is an understandable response considering that to many non-believers the Christian faith looks like a book of rules telling us what we should and should not do. But this could not be further from the truth; we are not deprived but empowered by God's grace. The creator of the universe loved us so much that he made a way for us to be with him for eternity, not by following the commandments in the Law, but through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Joseph was the favoured son of Jacob, who was unjustly sold into slavery by his brothers. God was with him in every situation,¹ and, by God's grace, he prospered and was put in charge of Potiphar's household. Yet he was wrongfully imprisoned because he refused the advances of Potiphar's wife.²

**God is for us and not against us;
if you are burdened or weary,
God will give you rest**

No matter what the circumstance, God is with us. He does not say we will not encounter distressing times, but even in these times, he is with us. The more impossible the challenge seems, the more God's power can manifest in our lives. God is for us and not against us; if you are burdened or weary, God will give you rest. Just as Joseph faced each circumstance not knowing what the outcome might be, it was later made clear that it was all used for God's purpose, 'You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.' (Genesis 50:20) God's plan is to prosper you, and not to harm you; his plan gives us hope and a future.³ Therefore, do good in the eyes of God, believe God has a purpose for you which will be carried out in your life amidst any trial.

service

In Matthew 23 Jesus tells the crowd about the teachers of the law and the pharisees who sit in the great prophet Moses' seat. Jesus says listeners should observe the teachers' words but not their actions, as the teachers do not practise what they preach, instead doing their deeds to be seen by others.

Intentions cannot be hidden from God, and all things should be done for God and through God which shows pure intentions. James 2:21-22 says, 'Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.' Paul tells the Colossians to work with all their heart, just as if working for God.⁴

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Before starting medical school, I was a martial arts teacher. A pupil in one of the older classes I taught would help me in teaching my classes. I was grateful for the help, but I was getting paid to teach and he was not. He was a hard worker, optimistic, and showed a passion for martial arts. As time passed, we got to know each other well and I learned that he faced a difficult childhood and was still struggling outside of the martial arts gym. Yet without fail he was at every class. His willingness to serve without compensation or recognition astounded me. It was clear in some sense that he found direction, purpose, and fulfillment through his service in the martial arts gym.

Jesus came to serve and not to be served. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. Should we not also adopt this attitude of service? Jesus said that the greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble

READING & RESOURCES:

Ethics is all about working out what is right and wrong, how we should or shouldn't live. Some people might just shrug their shoulders and think it's not for them, and say 'whatever'. For others the answer is simple – do whatever you like as long as it doesn't hurt others. Christian Medical, nursing, and midwifery students all sit courses on ethics, but it can seem very distant and academic, and far removed from the values that Jesus teaches. Giles Cattermole shows us in *Whatever* that ethical questions are not abstract philosophical choices but are rooted in our lived out, day-to-day faith in the Lord Jesus.



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themselves will be exalted. As our purpose is found in Christ Jesus, we must also serve others so Jesus' character may be reflected through our actions.

conclusion

Without God there is no purpose in life, leaving our time on earth meaningless. God has given each of us a purpose which is to spread the gospel of Jesus and to reflect Christ's love on earth. We are required by God to advance his kingdom in all nations. Zechariah 4:6 says, "'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,'" says the Lord Almighty.' God has given each of us talents, interests, and desires which can be amplified through his grace to fulfill his purpose for us here on earth. God has not intended any of us to complete our assignments on our own, but through the guidance of the Holy Spirit to fulfill his plan. ■

REFERENCES

1. Genesis 39:2
2. Genesis 39
3. Jeremiah 29:11
4. Colossians 3:23