

The Three Levels of Purpose

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When you are coaching around life purpose, it is helpful to understand how our purpose fits with God's overall plans for humanity. In Ephesians 1 Paul discusses our destiny: we were chosen "before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before him" and that we are predestined for adoption as sons. The passage concludes with God's overriding purpose: "to unite all things in Christ; things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). Paul saw our ultimate aim as *being together* with God in Christ, in the Kingdom of Heaven. The Holy Spirit is given to us now as the pledge of this inheritance: he lives in us now, so that we can be sure we will be together with Jesus in heaven. All God's other objectives for humanity flow from this purpose.

Paul also talks about purpose in terms of a mission he had to do: "To me, the very least of all the saints, this grace was given: to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). This is to be done "in accordance with the eternal purpose which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord" (3:11). That eternal purpose is the primary, *being together* purpose mentioned above. In other words, the *doing* purpose of our lives—our life mission—needs to flow out of and align with the *being together* purpose that is God's ultimate aim.

Here's what that signifies in practical terms. God's first priority is *you*: to be in a loving relationship with you and to bring you into oneness with himself. Being comes first, and doing second (see diagram). So *God will sometimes put your life mission on hold to have your heart*. If your life (or your client's life) is out of balance because you are doing too much ministry, God will eventually call you back to a balanced life, even if the ministry suffers. Even when you are doing well, living on-purpose and making a difference, God will prune your life back and lead you into outwardly-unproductive wilderness seasons to gain a greater grip on your heart.



One of my clients is a great example of this principle. Joe owned a multi-million-dollar company and was fully absorbed in running it, to the glory of God as best he understood it at the time. In the process of capturing his heart, God pruned Steve's life way back to prepare for greater growth. His company went bankrupt, and he endured a string of personal reverses that left him wondering where God was and what he was up to.

Facing these challenges reformed him into a man of prayer, a friend of solitude, and someone with a heart for the nations. He now travels overseas regularly to train leaders and

bring people to Christ. He's expressed to me several times how grateful he is for God's intervention, because he has come to a level of intimacy with God that he never knew before.

Joe learned that when God designs your life, growth in being together takes precedence over growth in productive doing. Relationship with God grows as becoming more like Christ enables you to understand him and enter into him more fully.



There is a third level of purpose as well. God is concerned not just with our *being together* with him (the Heavenly Kingdom) and our *missionary doing* to bring His Kingdom to others, but with our *temporal well-being*, too. "If God so clothes the grass of the field... will he not much more clothe you? ... your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things" (Mt. 6:30-32).

God wants you to see good in this life. He wants you to succeed, to experience love

and intimacy in relationships. As the Westminster Catechism teaches, man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

However, this isn't God's only (or even primary) purpose for you. Your union with him and growth in being conformed to Christ is much more important. So *God will put your happiness on the back burner to gain more of your heart*. That's right: success in your career, financial security, satisfying relationships, good health, you name it—all these things God may supply or withhold to gain your heart, because they are of incomparably less value than what He has for you in heaven.

This is important for coaches to keep in mind. Coaching people to health, happiness and wealth without explicitly engaging God's higher purposes can actually move people away from God. We may even find ourselves working against him! Understanding the levels of purpose helps us understand what God is really up to in our circumstances, and turn everything we face into a chance to know him better.