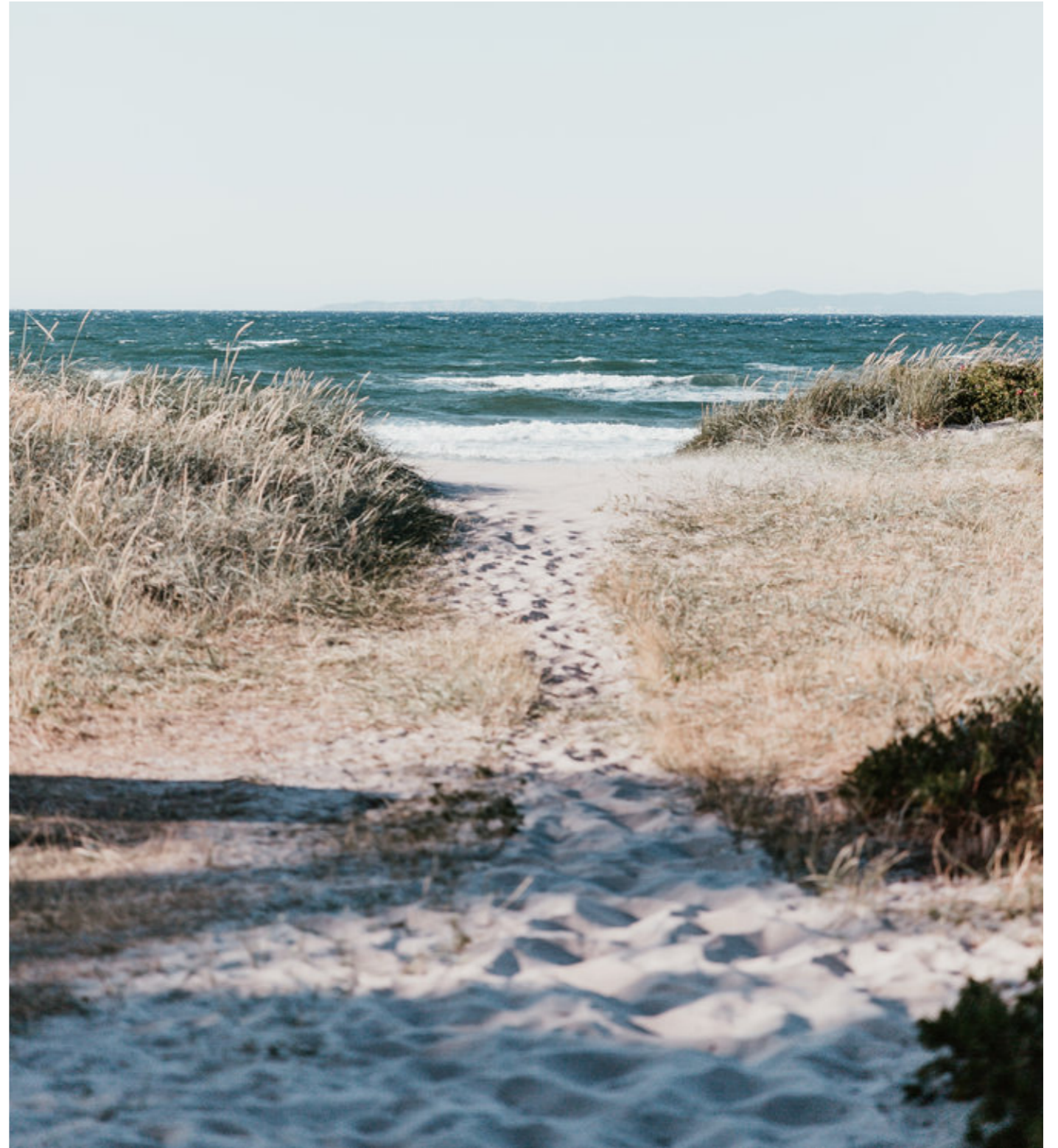


by Todd Baker

A Seven Day Journey Toward Purpose

December 2018



Day 1

Do you believe you have a purpose?

Ephesians 2:10, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

When life is a busy and repetitive routine it is easy to feel as if you have become the latest cog in the universe’s assembly line. I mean what kind of contribution can one person make anyway? Realizing that you are only one of seven billion people can feel like you are a meaningless drop of water in one of the world’s seven oceans?

When I’ve been in this place of wandering and wondering, I have often felt like giving up and have on many occasions. I am certain that I am not the only person who has felt this or given up on my unrealized dreams. It’s really not surprising that so many people are disillusioned in the world we live in today.

But, God doesn’t do cookie cutter or assembly line when it comes to you. Contrary to what we may think in the moment, God is intentional, purposeful, and infinitely creative. And however you may feel today, God wants you to know that He created you to live with His purpose for you.

He wants you to become just as purposeful and creative as He is. Don’t let yourself or anyone tell you that you don’t have something absolutely world-changing to contribute today. God has created you to accomplish something unique and with great purpose. I believe God is calling you today to begin to understand your purpose in His plan for your life.

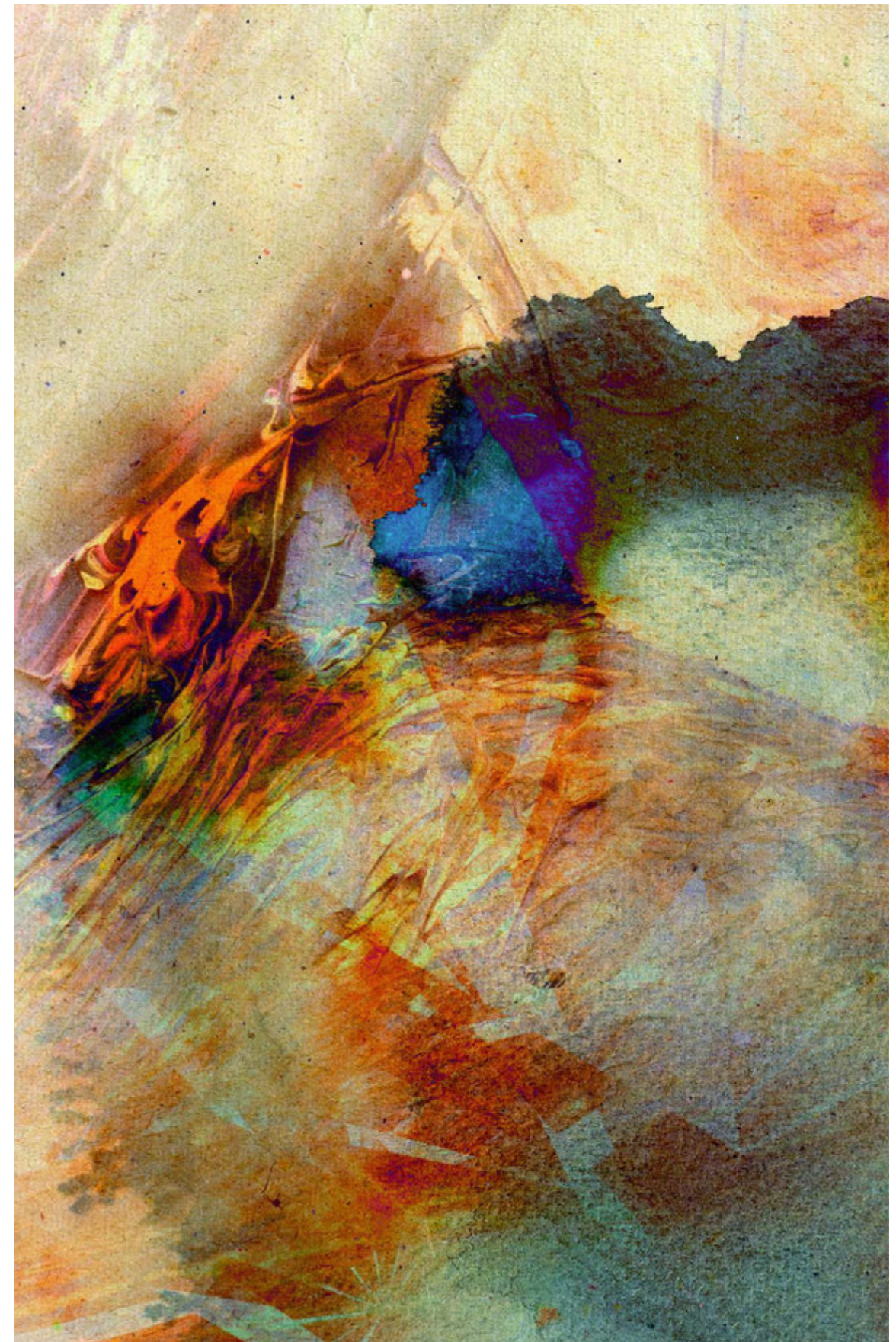
He has, in advance, created your life to be like a gigantic birthday present filled with all kinds of meaningful smaller presents for you to open at the right time throughout the course of your life. When you begin to open those presents, He will lovingly and excitedly smile as you open them to show you the good works that He has uniquely designed you to accomplish with Him.

Want to go on this journey of realizing God’s purpose for you?

Here is your first practice: Ask God the following question and listen quietly for two timed minutes - What have You created me to do today?

Sound too simple? When you start asking God questions and engage with Him purposefully, He will start revealing incredible things to you.

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; everyone who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened... how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” Matthew 7:7-8, 11



Day 2

What were you created to do today?

John 15:12-13, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”

We are all in the process of learning. There is not a day that goes by that you do not have an opportunity to learn something new. In this age of information, you have every piece of knowledge about your world that you could ever want to have. But with all this information, have we really come to better understand our purpose in life or have we simply become better trivia contestants?

You were lovingly and uniquely created by God for the purpose of loving the people in your life. In fact, Jesus labeled the action of loving others as second only to loving God Himself. In this passage of John 15, Jesus wanted to correct the disciples’ understanding of the way in which we are to approach all of life. Love was to be the primary motive. The love that he described here was not only for personal satisfaction or pleasure. Those results are secondary to the fulfillment of his primary command. Jesus clarified the type of love he was encouraging the disciples and us to pursue: to love sacrificially.

To God, the greatest way to express love for someone is to sacrifice yourself for them. There is no greater expression of love than this. Jesus was telling his friends that he was going to do the greatest thing that love can do. He was going to do the unthinkable and die for them. So is Jesus calling all of us to die physically for our friends? I believe not. Jesus was encouraging the disciples to die to their selfish inclinations so that they could fulfill God’s purpose for their lives: doing the great work of loving others. Therefore the greatest way to accomplish your purpose in life is to intentionally give up something you want (important to you) in order that someone else may benefit.

Ready to practice this? This is a tough but crucial behavior to learn from Jesus. I can’t tell you for whom you need to sacrifice yourself today. Only Jesus knows this. Chances are you have an inkling, but honestly it’s hard to know for certain.

The practice for today is to ask God: Who can I help today?

Learning to practice this one thing will align you with God’s purpose for your life more than anything else you will ever do. As you learn to think more sacrificially toward the people in your life, you will begin learning how Jesus thinks of them and you.



Day 3

How do you stay focused on your purpose?

John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.”

Living each day with your purpose in mind will lead you to have the full and satisfied life that God wants for you. The good works you were created to do will lie dormant and become nothing more than good intentions without the power and help of Jesus. Jesus was born into our world primarily to save us from our sins. And an important benefit of that saving is that Jesus wants to help us here and now to live the abundant life He created us to live. We don't have to wait until Heaven to experience a glimpse of that full life.

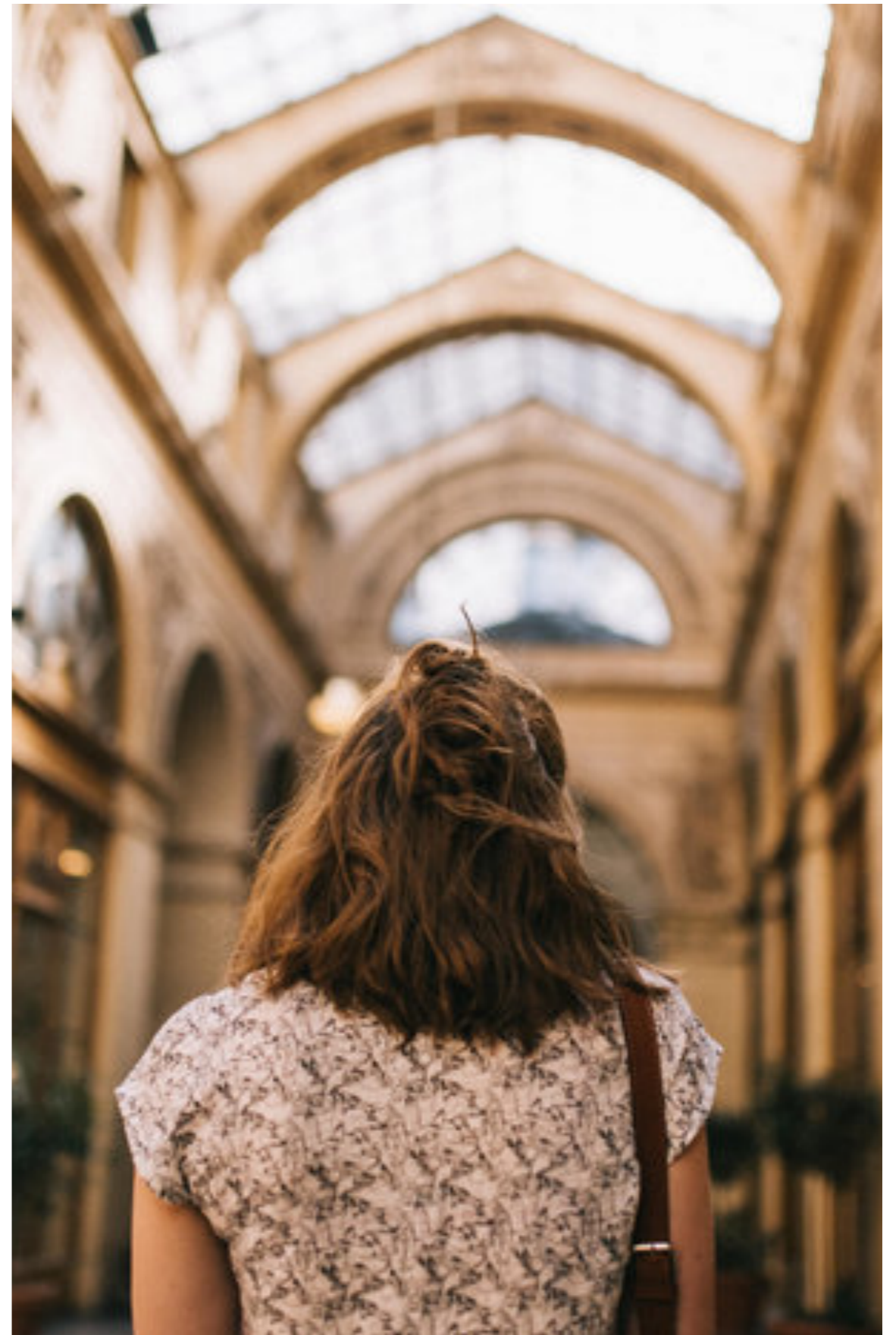
When Jesus was leaving the disciples, he said “I'm leaving you physically but I will be with you always” (my paraphrase from Mt 28:30). In other words, “I'm not *really* leaving you.” The problem is that many followers of Jesus are taught to think that Jesus saved them to walk alone on a path towards God. This perspective is penance not grace. From Jesus' perspective, He is walking on the path with the people who follow Him because He is in them. Now what does that mean for Jesus to be “in you”?

In John 14:20, Jesus told the disciples this: “You will know at that time that I am in my Father and he is in me and I am in you.” So if you have chosen to follow Jesus and become his disciple, He is there right now inside you. Now here's a mind-blowing thought: not only is Jesus inside you, but the Father and the Holy Spirit are inside you as well working in your heart and mind and encouraging you to fulfill the good works that He created you to do. This means you are never alone. God is always with you. But, even though God is in you, being able to keep the good work that He created for you to do at the top of your list each day is tough.

Here's a practice to keep you focused: Begin your day by simply asking God to help you to do the good that **ONLY** you can do.

Whether your prayer is two minutes or two hours is irrelevant. Positioning your heart and mind in a posture of faith and dependence on God is what is important. The beginning of God opening your eyes to the good work, and therefore purpose, He created only you to do today must begin with prayer.

Over the next four mornings, begin this process - Start your day, whether after your coffee or while you're in the shower, with bowing your heart before God and saying, “Help me Father to see the good works you created uniquely and only for me to do today, and help me to do them... in Jesus' name.”



Day 4

When do I work on my purpose?

John 9:4, “Jesus said, “As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent me.”

If you are alive today, then God has a purpose for you and the people you will come into contact with today. In our compartmentalized, overly busy world, purpose-filled living becomes the first casualty of an unpredictable or packed schedule. In fact, busyness will replace purpose every time.

No matter whether you are Type A or Type B, introverted or extroverted, something will distract you that will make you “too busy” to focus your heart and mind on the purpose God has for you today. Hear what Jesus is saying today... the “work of Him” is so important that it has to become the priority in our schedules.

What is the “work of Him” for me? As Jesus stated the two most important commandments in Matthew 22:34-40, He gave everyone a bulls-eye to fulfilling the purpose he created them to accomplish: Love the LORD your God and love other people as you love yourself. That’s the “work of Him” for you.

Who will you see this week? Who are you already planning to see this week? How does God want you to love them? Not how do you want to love them or how do you think they need to be loved, but how does God want you to take an interest in them or help them this week? The answers to those questions will launch you down the path of accomplishing your purpose today and everyday.

If you are a follower of Jesus, you have been sent in the same way that Jesus was sent by His Father to do the work of loving people as Jesus loved people. The emphasis in this one verse is that you or someone you care about is going to miss out on experiencing the love of God if you continue to allow your busy schedule to dictate whether you do this good work of God or not.

Here’s a practice to consider: think of one person you are already planning to see this week. Start making a list of their interests today. What do they care about? What do they like doing for fun? What kind of work do they do? Do they enjoy it? If they could do anything they wanted to do, what would it be?

Now, have you ever asked this person these questions? Think about these questions when you meet with them this week. Pray that God would help you to hear one thing that they like to do. Now this is not a time to overwhelm someone with questions. It’s a time for you to engage intentionally with God on behalf of someone else. That’s what it means to love someone else as you love yourself.

When you start doing this for one person, you will be positioning yourself to know how to encourage them and love them the way Jesus does. Don’t wait! Start today!



Day 5

Don't give up on your purpose.

Philippians 1:6, "God, who began a good work in you, will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Much of the emphasis on this seven day journey has been on the good work God is calling us to do. The burden of accomplishing that work is *not* on your shoulders. The Apostle Paul reminds us that the good work you have been invited to do was begun by God, will be carried by God as you work on it with Him, and will ultimately be completed by God when His Kingdom is established on earth.

The purpose for which God created you, to love Him and to love the people in your life, was never meant to be a burden you would carry alone. If it feels that way, then you are not accomplishing the purpose He created for you with His help. Is loving people difficult? In our own strength, yes it is. Loving people is actually impossible in our own strength. But we try to love the people in our lives all on our own.

If we are to fulfill the purpose for which God created us to accomplish, then we must structure our lives in such a way that the strength of loving people comes from Him alone.

Jesus gave a great process of how to structure our lives in this way in Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to me... take my yoke... learn from me." The yoke was a collar used to teach a less experienced ox how to plow a field without wearing itself out. By being connected to a more experienced ox, the younger ox would learn how to carry its load without becoming exhausted. Jesus is inviting us to learn His ways of loving people so that we don't wear ourselves out. Loving people is hard work. People who are worn out can't love anyone in the way they need to be loved.

Here's a practice to begin: put down your pen, close your eyes, take a deep breath, and say, "Jesus, I can't carry this load by myself anymore... I need your help. Help me to learn from you today."

Come to Jesus today. Hand him your burdens, both mental and physical. Asking him to help you to learn from him will make all the difference. It's not a magical prayer. It's simply you acknowledging and accepting that you need help. And Jesus is THE someone who will not judge you and who only wants to help you.

Now doesn't that feel good? I think it does. Now, take a fresh, deep breath and consider this as you go about your day... The work God designed for you to do is firmly secure in His hands. He is carrying it on to completion. He will make it perfectly complete in the right time and in the right way.



Day 6

How will my purpose change me for the better?

Colossians 3:23, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord Jesus, not for men or women.”

On Day Five, you began to learn to surrender your work into the hands of Jesus, he is the one who works incessantly with you to fulfill the good works he created you to do (Ephesians 2:10). At this point in the journey, I believe it is important to re-emphasize that everything you do today is considered “work for the Lord.” Somewhere along the line people in the church have separated so-called “sacred” work from “secular” work. That is utter foolishness.

As Paul reminds us in Colossians, anything you do throughout the course of your day can be considered as “working for the Lord.” So instead of compartmentalizing sacred acts for some days of the week only, consider that every act you do throughout the day has the potential for being sacred to God. When you see each moment of your day this way, you will begin to change how you approach each day for the better.

Here’s your practice for today: Whether it’s folding the laundry or making a cup of coffee, begin to ask God to help you see the seemingly routine things you do as a good work that He created you to do.

Why? Aren’t I just making a cup of coffee? Yes. But consider this, when you begin to bring God into the process of making that cup of coffee with you, it changes how you approach making it. When you ask Him to help you to patiently measure out the grounds and water and to wait patiently as it brews in the pot or in your cup, your mind is not focused on all how you couldn’t sleep the night before or the meeting you are worried about leading or attending; instead, your heart and mind begin to focus on the one task in front of you, which is to make a cup of coffee with God.

That may sound too elementary, but I assure you it is not. When you begin to invite God into the work of doing your daily and moment-by-moment routines, you begin to commit all of what you do and all of who you are to the Lord. That new process will do three things: 1) it will train your mind to invite God into your work; 2) it will help you to see your interactions with people and projects as work you do with God; and 3) it will help you to realize that the work you accomplish each day will not be only for yourself, your boss or co-workers, your teachers, or your family, but your work will be accomplished for Jesus.

When you commit your work to Jesus, realizing that he is helping you to accomplish it, you will work differently and with unique energy. Proverbs 16:3 says that when we commit ALL our work to God, He will make our plans succeed.



Day 7

How will I know that I am accomplishing my purpose?

Hebrews 6:10, “God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them.”

On our final day of this journey toward learning to live your life for the purpose that God created you, it is essential to know that all our efforts to accomplish our purpose in this life have a foundation on faith in Jesus. “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). It is difficult to not see the results of your good work. In a world that is built on seeing results, we’ve conditioned ourselves to think that if we don’t see the results of what we’ve done then we haven’t accomplished our purpose. Not so.

God, in His Word, over and over, promises that the work we do for Him in this life, whatever it may be, however large or small, will be rewarded more than we can imagine. In Hebrews 6, we are reminded that God doesn’t forget any of the work and love that you show to Him and others. You can be confident that the good work you do in Jesus will not be forgotten or overlooked by God, even if you don’t see the results of your labor.

The perspective God wants us to embrace on our life-long journey towards fulfilling our purpose is trusting that doing good for Him really matters for eternity. So whatever you do today, see it as an opportunity to live out your purpose of doing the good work you were created to do. And as you do your work today, realize that God has something unbelievable planned for all of us to celebrate together as a culmination of all the good works He has orchestrated throughout generations of people who have followed Him. You are part of that great work!

It may seem that we are at the end of a journey, but be assured that this is only the beginning. The process of realizing that you were created by God to accomplish good works that He created for you is a life-long process. God’s plan is that you will continuously grow, develop, and become the best version of you that He can help you become.

Here’s our last practice to consider: Since God will not forget your good work and love you show Him and others, start praying specifically for the people in your life asking God to keep using you to help them know His love.

No matter your place in life, God has good and creative work He wants you to accomplish with Him today. As you learn to do the work God created you to do of loving others as Jesus did, you will experience unimaginable rewards that God is waiting to show you. So get out there today and do the good you were made to do!

