



SERIES: THE KINGS QUEST FOR MEANING IN THE REAL WORLD

Lesson #8: "God's Purpose for Putting You NOW"

Opening Events and Prayer

Icebreaker: What did (do) you want to be when you grew (grow) up? Why? Did you do it? Are you on your way? What Stopped you?

Nathan Hale who when captured and convicted of spying against the British in the American Revolution boldly proclaimed, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country." What is it about dreams of magnificent purpose or people who boldly stand for a cause that inspires you?

Life matters and as Jesus says we should not worry about tomorrow, but rather pay attention to today. It's what God's given you to work with. It's when he can work on you. Solomon's quest for purpose, in the end comes down to...

Read 12:13-14 - Gaining a global sense of purpose

*As our journey of discovery comes to a close, we have examined many of the things that people pursue to find contentment and clarity in life. Yet, we have one more lesson to learn from the master teacher. A truth that I believe Irenaeus of Lyons captures so well in a single statement, "The glory of God is in man fully alive." **[Feel free to add as much or as little background on Irenaeus as you would like from the Teacher Resources]** Solomon concluded his search with a statement as well that echoes in these words written centuries after the old king's death...¹³ Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. ~ Ecclesiastes 12:13-14*

*When our steps are directed by pursuit of contentment and clarity in Christ, our lives become places where God's glory shines its brightest. God's purpose is to **unleash** the power of **his** potential in you by **conforming** you to the likeness of his **Son** (Rom. 8:29). He's shaping you into one who fears him and keeps his commands so your life can be all he intended it to be right now, today! He didn't make you for any other time period.*

Solomon's words have always been true for the all of God's people for all times. If you get this purpose straight, you'll get life truly right. Solomon points out God will bring condemnation through judgment for those who fail to show his global purpose for mankind. Those who chose to respond positively to God's global purpose receive salvation by grace. It really is that simple. Peter says, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Pet 3:9) This is God's purpose, in a global sense, i.e. his purpose for all of humanity.



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According to our author, the whole duty of man is to:

- 1) **Fear** God. We stand in awe of God, respect and honor him and orient the direction of our lives to full submission to his boundless wisdom, knowing that he alone knows the end from the beginning and that nothing is a perplexing mystery for him.*
- 2) To **keep** his **commandments**. We embrace and follow God's truth. We allow him to set the course of our behavior, living within the parameters he has set forth. When we do these things hebel is not just tolerable, it can be integrated into a life brimming with satisfaction and certainty.*

These two points are suspiciously similar to Jesus' statement regarding the two greatest commandments in that he says number one love God and number two love others, which is the outworking of his commands.

- **Discussion Questions:**

- *Why are most people dissatisfied with God's global purpose of conforming us to the image of Jesus so we can change the world for him?*
- *Should Christians be afraid of the unknown nature of the future in their lives? Explain.*

Once we get God's global sense of purpose, the desire for conformity to the likeness of Jesus, as the cornerstone of our lives, then we can get a bit more specific by...

Developing a vision for life

This is a movement from the macro to the micro, from "What does God desire from all his people in general?" to "What might that look like for me?" We're talking about vision in the sense of how you view your life meeting this global purpose of God.

- **Read 3:9-22 - God designed life to be lived within his parameters**

*He has made an appropriate time to unfold all of life's events. This is the content of 1-8 there is a beautiful rhythm to life. God designed it to be dynamic, challenging, and constantly morphing into something more than we typically make life out to be. Perhaps, from our perspective, the beauty of life's movements and dynamism can only be understood when it's been lived and hindsight becomes 20/20. **What's unfolding in your life right now?***

He set eternity in our hearts, life without end. Life is going somewhere, forever. It is a journey of unending discovery. What a magnificent God to have designed such an

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*existence for his creatures! God specially designed us to experience life to its full by providing the desires that cause us to seek contentment and clarity and by providing us with minds capable of finding more in the moment than the events themselves. He gave us a capacity for attributing meaning to and enjoying the things he gives. **What eternal things are you discovering at this moment in your life?***

- What he does stands **forever** and life is **complete** within his boundaries.
*Although man perverts justice and attempts to overturn Godly order, in the end there is nothing but Godly order. God has full control of how things will turn out. He will examine the heart of a person and call it to account for what he has done. Although man thinks himself advanced or privileged, he is not at any advantage, in terms of survivability. He dies, just as an animal does. So things done under the sun, temporary things, are of no lasting value. It is only the things of God that last. God alone determines a person's destiny. Worrying, striving, planning, scheming, investing, can't change any of this. Wise people enjoy what God provides in the way he intends making life the best it can possibly be. **What is God building into you right now that will stand the test of time? How is that changing your future?***

*Humanity **cannot** grasp God's larger scheme, he works in **mysterious** ways. We are confined within our own time, in the midst of uncertainties, yet still enjoy God's blessings. It's about enjoying the common experiences of life, joyfulness in the daily, not just in the extraordinary. As Bland says, "In the midst of the sea of ambiguity, Solomon carves out a space for enjoyment...he concludes that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work. Such enjoyment is a part of the human lot...The human lot is like a plot of land that one inherits. A natural part of receiving the land is that it requires hard work to maintain it. Along with the toil, the worker receives enjoyment in seeing the land produce...The enjoyment experienced is not the pursuit of the material goods but appreciating the moment." (Bland, d., pg. 330) **How is taking in all of today an important part of how you live?***

- **Read 9:7-10** - God designed you **uniquely**
*When God made you he **broke** the **mold**. We are distinct from the rest of creation. Take for instance Hawaii's state fish the Humuhumunukunukuapua'a. That's a rather unique name, but if you lined up 100 humu's they might look slightly different and be slightly different in size, but they would basically be the same. Line up 100 people and, although there would be similarities, they would differ on a dimension that the humu's just don't have. The gifts and abilities that God designed into you manifest themselves in you in ways they do not in any other person. Your personality and temperament is unlike any other. He designed you to experience life like no one else. This is one of the*

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reasons that we love hearing stories about people, we're all so different. To quote the wife of a friend, "We have three kids and they are all opposites!"

Remember Paul's instructions in 1 Cor 10:31. We do everything for God's glory! "Whatever you find to do," Solomon says, "do it with all your might!" "This is not an exhortation simply to flail around with your hands, and whatever they grasp, work hard at it. Rather whatever fits your hand, that is, what you have the ability to do, put every ounce of effort you have into seeing the task to completion." (Bland, D. pg. 373)

*God wants to enliven every unique moment of your life. When you do that you start to unearth the you he made you to be. Don't underestimate his creativity; he specializes in using unique people in unique ways during unique moments. When you catch this, life becomes an adventure. **"Who did God make me? What is it that makes me stand out from all the other fish, even if I get ridiculed by the other fish for it? How can God use me exactly how I am right now?"***

- **Read 8:12 – 17** - Some things in life will always be a mystery
*Don't expect God to provide you with comprehensive blueprints for your life. Solomon tells us that you cannot search out everything that goes on under the sun, so why make that necessary for enjoying life and understanding God's vision for your life? Understanding and responding effectively to what God has in mind for you right now is what's both possible and important. This is not suggesting that you can't have dreams for the future. Big plans, big hopes, big dreams are all things God has designed you to have and those are great, but you don't know how it's going to work out. You can't figure life out completely. The only person that has your life figured out is God. He'll reveal what you need to understand about it in his time. Some things you'll never figure out. Learning to be okay with that is one of life's greatest challenges, but it comes down to trusting the one that does know and living in what he's revealed until he calls you to the next step. **How okay are you with mystery?***
- **Read 12:9-10** - Take what God has provided and run with it
The words of the wise are like goads, like cattle prods. They are urging you on. Once you grasp what God has enabled you to do today, how he's uniquely equipped you to thrive in life, get on with it! Don't rest on your laurels, get to living. Don't go through the days of your life questioning everything that God permits or places in your life. Assume he knows what he's doing. Let his wise words drive you forward. It's worthwhile to ask why, to seek understanding, but once God provides enough light for the next step take it! A great deal of the guidance we sit around praying for, just hoping God will provide some miraculous sign or heavenly messenger to deliver, has been in our hands for years in the pages of the Bible. The problem seems to be that we

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*fail to study his word and allow his Spirit to paint the vision before our eyes. **Are you emboldened by God's Word?***

• **Discussion Questions:**

- *How does the fact that some things in life will always remain a mystery strike you? Does that make you feel more hesitant or bold? Would life be more or less enjoyable if you had a comprehensive blueprint for your life? Why?*
- *How is life enhanced, both for you and others, when you live out your uniqueness within the parameters that God has set forth in his Word?*

A lot of God's putting you right now is so that you can ...

Enjoy the ride

- **Read 2:24-26 - Enjoyment** in life is from the **hand** of God -
God provides life in all of its richness. Satisfaction and enjoyment is not in the circumstances, but in the One who provided them. In its totality, life lived as God intends is fantastic. This is why Solomon says "A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work (2:24a) To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness. (2:26a) So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man... all the days of the life God has given him under the sun. (8:15)
- Delight in the **mystery**
*A big part of enjoying the ride is **NOT** being able to figure it all out. God did this intentionally. How sweet is a surprise or an unexpected blessing? How dull would life be if it was all mapped out for us or if we never wondered if we'd be able to do something? There would be nothing new. There would be no "ah-ha! Moments". No one would need to explore or test their limits. We'd never wonder how the story ends or if something would be successful. If we knew the future, the future would be about as exciting as many people's view of history. Instead of bemoaning the fact that God alone knows the future and you can't figure it out, ask, "I wonder what he's got up his sleeve today?" and eagerly anticipate.*
- Delight in the **diversity** of life
*We can then enjoy the **pleasures** of life. We can eat with gladness and drink with joy. Our senses can delight in the very things God designed to stimulate them and cause a pleasurable response. We can be astounded by mountain vistas and humbled by tears. We can be inspired by feats of daring and melted by a tender embrace.*

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We can enjoy the community of life. Solomon says enjoy life **with** your wife or literally, "see life with a wife that you love." God designed us for community from the beginning as husbands and wives, as the only creatures capable of friendships, and as the church. This is no surprise. Fellowship is at the heart of our God who is three-in-one.

We can enjoy the Festivity of life. The images of people clothed in white and anointed with oil are of those prepared for celebration & feasting. God's people are characterized by a celebratory spirit reflecting gratitude and recognizing all good we receive is a gift from God. What could make us want to celebrate more than to know, without a shadow of a doubt, the Mighty Creator of this thrilling a universe also loves us as a community of unique beings created in his image.

We can enjoy the physical variety of life. We can see, know, and interact with people and creatures of stunning variance and complexity. The breathtaking manner in which God himself arranged matter drives us to explore, to understand, to drink it all in.

We can enjoy the work in life as given by a God who never ceases working. We reflect his glory when we take delight in the work for which he has uniquely fashioned us.

- **Read 11:7-10** - Delight in the totality of life

It's easy for people to think about enjoying youth, when eyes and mind are sharp, when physical vigor is at its peak, when you feel there is no stopping you. Solomon says "However many years a man may live, **let him enjoy them all.**" (11:8). "Banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body for youth and vigor are meaningless." (11:10) Get on with the show, regardless of where you are in life. Live knowing that what you do with life from start to finish is judged by God. Live in such a way that God can look upon your life and say, "Well done! You lived a life that honored me by demonstrating the great breadth and wonder of life as only I could have meant it!"

- **Discussion Questions:**

- How many Sunday School lessons or sermons have you heard that advocated enjoying life right now? Why do you think that is? Do you think we end up more future-focused than God intended?
- Hard times come and it can be hard to feel happy. Is it possible to enjoy life without necessarily feeling happy all the time? Explain.

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Read 7:15-18 - Why God wants you to be a "risky" person

Ecclesiastes tells us over and over again that there will be an end to the opportunities – 9:4-6, 11:3-4 - that the zest of life can only be enjoyed today - 9:7-12. Solomon points out that God's man or woman is not satisfied with the recklessness of fools or the legalism of the overly pious. A Godly person is in control of himself. Self-control, self-discipline, is characteristic The Spirit's activity in a person. God's woman or man decides to step boldly into the fray. God never meant us to be perfectly safe, nor did he intend us to be careless. He didn't want us to shy away from the tough things in life. He gave us a spirit of power, not timidity. He did this because his purpose in this world is to crush the rebellion of Satan and his followers whilst rescuing as many held captive as are willing to be set free. He gave you and me, as Christians, crucial roles in this epic drama. God did not call you to live a safe life that people around you would see as boring. He calls you to live a life of impact. This is the abundant life Jesus describes in John 10.

If we lived this way, people could clearly see that Christians, God's people, are the only ones who truly understand life. We wouldn't have to tell a soul that Jesus has brought us new life. They would see that new life at work. The contentment and clarity in life and the strength of faith to deal with life's hebel would showcase God in our lives. They'd see it when you stand firm in the face of trial allowing your character and steadfast loyal service to glorify God even in the face of anger - 10:1-4. They'd see the confidence of faith as you step forward in without full understanding of the whole road map, giving generously, fearlessly forging ahead when others sit idle - 11:1-2, 5-6. Others can see God's Spirit fully alive in you, but only when you are fully alive. God put you NOW to do what only you can do with him here and now. Don't miss the opportunity!

• **Discussion Questions:**

- *How would Colorado Springs be different if Christians here lived without fear?*
- *What keeps you "safe" in harbor when life's adventure is out on the rolling sea?*
- *"Fearing God and keeping his commands is the essence or substance of what humans are about" (Bland, D., pg. 398) - 12:13-14 - So what are you going to do about it? Where has God placed an open door for you today?*

• **For further investigation:**

- *Make a list of all the "risky" people of God in the Bible. How many can you find that fit that mold?*



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- *How many people can you find in the Bible whom God rewarded for playing it safe? (hint: begin with Matt. 25)*