

Discovering Your Purpose

Colossians 1:24-2:5

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A truck driver was hauling a load of 500 penguins to the zoo. Unfortunately, his truck broke down. He eventually waved down another truck and offered the driver \$500 to take the penguins to the zoo.

The next day the first truck driver got his truck fixed and drove into town and couldn't believe his eyes! Just ahead of him he saw the second truck driver crossing the road with the 500 penguins waddling single file behind him. He jumped out of his truck, ran up to the guy and said, "What's going on? I gave you \$500 to take these penguins to the zoo!"

To which the man responded, "I did take them to the zoo. But I had enough money left over so now we're going to the movies."



That guy didn't fully understand what he was supposed to be doing. Likewise, many believers today are fuzzy about their sense of purpose. As we examine the Book of Colossians, we'll discover our reason for living. **Colossians 1:24-2:5** answers the question, "**Now that Jesus is supreme in my life, what is my purpose as a believer?**"

This passage gives us six strategic statements that will help us discover what we've been designed to do.

1. Suffer Joyfully for the Gospel

We might not expect this first one to even be included in the list, but **verse 24** makes it clear that Paul saw suffering as part of the job description of a Christ follower: "**Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.**" Paul willingly and joyfully suffered on behalf of others for the sake of the gospel. The little word "**now**" does more than just provide a transition. Paul is rejoicing precisely because of what he has just written and he's rejoicing now (at present) while in prison.

Most of us try to get rid of suffering when it comes our way. When we're in pain, we want to relieve it. Paul was different. He found joy in what he suffered. In **2 Corinthians 7:4** he declares, "**...In all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.**" And he suffered far more than most of us ever will. Listen to what he writes in **2 Corinthians 11:24-29**: "**Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night**

and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?"

Before Paul's conversion, he inflicted suffering on believers. And now he's suffering for them. From the very moment of his conversion, in [Acts 9:16](#), Paul was told that difficulty was going to be part of his discipleship when Jesus said: **"I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."**

When Paul speaks of **"filling up in his flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions,"** he is not implying that there is some insufficiency in what Christ accomplished on the cross. As we learned last week in [Colossians 1:22](#), we have been reconciled by **"Christ's physical body through death to present us holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."** His death has brought us peace with God and there's nothing left to be done, except to respond to what He has done on our behalf.

The word **"afflictions"** is never used of the sufferings of Jesus on the cross, but instead refers to the **"pressures"** of life that Paul endured. Christ suffered in death to save the church, and now Paul suffered in life to spare it. John Piper writes that **"Christ's cross was for propitiation; ours is for propagation. Christ suffered to accomplish salvation. We suffer to spread salvation."** (Sermon by John Piper: "Called to Suffer and Rejoice," 8/30/92).

Paul suffered for at least three reasons. **First**, he was suffering because of Jesus Christ. Like the early believers in [Acts 5:41](#), Paul rejoiced that he was **"counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."** **Second**, he suffered because of the Gentiles. Paul was committed to take the gospel to all people, not just to those who thought they were worthy of it. In fact, he was in prison precisely because he had taken the good news to the Gentiles in [Acts 22:21-22](#). In [Philippians 1:12](#) Paul wrote from prison: **"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel."** **Third**, he suffered for the sake of Christ's body, the church. As the believers saw him suffer, it gave them courage to face persecution in their lives.

Since the church is Christ's body today, when Paul suffered, Christ suffered. What Jesus began as suffering with his persecution and rejection on earth, believers complete in His continuing body on earth. As such, we should not be surprised when we go through tough times. Jesus stated in [John 15:20](#), **"If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."** Another way to say it is that when the gospel is carried to the ends of the earth, it will be accompanied with difficulty. In fact, in order to share the gospel, it is necessary to share in Christ's afflictions.

Paul's understanding of persecution, difficulty, and suffering can help us when affliction visits our life. **Verse 24** reminds us to suffer joyfully for the gospel. In order to do so, we must keep the following in mind:

Suffering is part of discipleship. Christ followers are recognized by the trials they endure because they follow a suffering Savior. **1 Peter 4:12:** **“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.”**

We know Jesus best when we suffer with Him. **Philippians 3:10:** **“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in death.”**

Suffering is a privilege as we see in **1 Peter 4:13:** **“But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”** Suffering produces greater faith and accelerates character development. **Romans 5:3-4:** **“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”**

How far are you willing to go in suffering for the gospel? Most of us frankly would be better off if we faced some persecution. That leads to the second purpose statement.

2. Serve According to Your Calling

Look at **verses 25-27:** **“I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness--the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”** As Paul likes to do, he refers to himself as a servant. Since Jesus was supreme in His life, Paul was fully devoted to follow Him wholeheartedly. This word “servant” can be translated, “minister.” The word “commission” means “management” or “stewardship.” Just as a well-trusted servant would manage his master's estate, so Paul was entrusted with a special task.

That task was to present the “word of God in its fullness.” Paul was a servant and his calling was to fully make known the Word of God. I recognize my responsibility to preach the Word of God in its fullness. That means that I won't shrink away from communicating the Bible, even when it's not popular. Someone has said that a pastor's job is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. That sounds like something the apostle Paul would agree with. That's why we preach about heaven and hell, that's why we proclaim that Jesus is the only way to a relationship with God, and that's why we are unashamedly committed to the sanctity of human life. Living Word Christian Center stands on the Bible and is committed to presenting the Word of God in its fullness.

The false teachers in Colosse believed that spiritual perfection was a hidden plan, or mystery, that only a few privileged people could discover. Paul defines this mystery as

God calling all people everywhere to faith in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles. **Ephesians 3:6** makes the mystery clear: **“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”**

The mystery is actually Christ in us, the hope of glory. I continue to be amazed at how God would allow me to experience salvation through Christ. I certainly don’t deserve it, and neither do you. When we contemplate the magnitude of this truth, we will engage our time, our talents, and our treasures and serve accordingly.

Several years ago in one of the issues of Focus on the Family magazine, Martha Williamson, a born-again believer, and the executive producer of the popular TV show, “Touched By An Angel,” reveals what brings her the most satisfaction in her life: “One of my greatest joys are the letters that tell what a wonderful witnessing tool the show has been.” Martha Williamson is serving according to her calling.

One of my favorite things as a pastor is to watch believers get fired up to serve in areas that are a perfect match for who God created them to be. This past week, Pastor Luis in Honduras and I met with the church leadership in order to put some plans together for the new Prayer Partner ministry, which you will be hearing more about in the near future. Luis’s vision is to have a group of people meet every Sunday morning both before and during the services to pray. He’s presented the idea to about 80 people already in small groups and can’t wait to share it with more! Luis understands that he is serving the commission that God has given him.

Are you serving according to your calling? If not, you don’t know what you’re missing! As we serve, we then come to the third purpose.

3. Move People to Maturity

Look at **verse 28**: **“We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.”** Paul shifts back to **“we”** in this verse to let them know that he and Epaphras were proclaiming the good news, and the false teachers were not. The Greek text is quite emphatic: **“Him we proclaim!”** The word **“proclaim”** refers to an official proclamation, like when someone would speak on behalf of the emperor. It meant official business was being spoken and therefore was to be accurate and clear, and delivered with authority.

We are to proclaim Christ, which is exactly what Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 4:5**: **“For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord.”** When we talk to others about our faith, we must always focus on Christ, not on ourselves. Notice that the word **“everyone”** is repeated twice, which shows that every single believer is capable of Christian maturity. This central task is linked to a twofold emphasis.

The first word **“admonishing,”** carries with it the idea of warning, or helping to set someone’s mind into proper order. Paul didn’t hold back when he thought someone

needed to be warned about what they were doing or about what they believed. We need to be willing to admonish one another in a spirit of love, as well as receive warning and correction when we need it.

The second emphasis is on **“teaching,”** which refers to the clear communication of the Word of God. Instruction in creed and conduct is critical to Christian growth. That’s why it’s the first purpose of our IMPACT statement. Jesus left us the responsibility in **Matthew 28:20** to teach disciples to obey everything He commanded. We need to look for opportunities to teach and we need to make sure we’re taking advantage of learning opportunities.

An effective presentation of the gospel always includes both warning and teaching. The warning is that without Christ, people are lost and headed to the agony of hell. The teaching is that salvation is available only by grace through faith in Christ.

The goal of proclaiming Christ through admonishment and teaching is so that we can “present everyone perfect in Christ.” Paul was a perfectionist in the sense that he desperately wanted everyone to become complete in Christ. The word perfect means **“full grown, or spiritually mature.”** Our job as a church is not just to admonish, or even to teach. We do those things in order to create spiritually mature Christ-followers. We should all be in the process of growth, of becoming more like Jesus every day. Our focus is not on numerical growth, but on spiritual growth. We don’t want to just build buildings; we want to build believers. We’re all about transformation, not just information.

If we’re serious about moving people to maturity then we can’t be passive or lazy. Instead, we must...

4. Work Wholeheartedly with His Energy

Look at **verse 29** and **verse 1** of **chapter 2**: **“To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.”**

When Paul says, **“To this end I labor,”** he’s referring to proclaiming Christ and presenting believers. He labors and struggles in this task. To **“labor”** means to **“grow weary through hard toil.”** The word **“struggle”** comes from the root word in Greek translated **“agony.”** Both words were used of athletes competing in the arena, or of a laborer working to the point of exhaustion. Paul used this same word at the end of his life as he reflected on how he had lived in **2 Timothy 4:7**: **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”**

We’re called to lay ourselves out, to become spiritually fatigued in order to move people toward full devotion to Christ. I’m humbled by the many people who minister here at Living Word Christian Center churches around the world with that kind of

determination. If you're tired and wiped out as you reach out to others, you're in the company of the apostle Paul.

Notice that Paul doesn't just work in his own strength; He instead relies on the power of Christ as he struggles **“with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me.”** There's a play on words in the Greek text here. We might translate it this way: **“Striving according to His energy which powerfully energizes within me.”** Paul surrendered his availability to God's ability.

Since Christ is in us, the hope of glory, He will provide us with His supernatural strength and explosive energy as we labor to propel people to maturity. Do you see the cooperation and combined effort between Christ and us? The work of salvation is “all of Christ and none of me” but in order to live out my purpose it must be “all of Christ and all of me.” This is another mystery, that God would choose to use you and me, in spite of our weaknesses, in order to help people become mature in Christ.

Friends, don't hold back. Let's not become spiritually lethargic or lukewarm. Let's burn bright and take it up a notch as we labor and lean on Christ for His strength. In our efforts to help people, Paul next clarifies what this involves.

5. Enrich the Lives of Others

Look at **verses 2-3**: **“My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”** Paul very clearly states that his longing is for believers to be encouraged in heart. The word **“encouraged”** means **“to call alongside.”** The picture is of someone trying to move a heavy object when another person comes to help out. A discouraged individual has lost “courage.” When we come alongside, God can use us to pour some courage back in. Paul gave similar instruction in **1 Thessalonians 5:11**: **“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are now doing.”**

We're to enrich one another through encouragement and we're to do whatever it takes to be **“united in love.”** This is a medical metaphor that means to be **“knit together in love.”** As members of the body of Christ, we're not to be out of joint with anyone. Did you notice that it's impossible to fulfill these responsibilities unless we're living in community with one another? You can't do it alone. Everyone here needs you, and you need everyone else. Do you know of anyone who seems a bit low today? If so, do what it takes to encourage him or her. Are you out of sync with someone? Anyone you've been avoiding because of some conflict or hurt feelings? Meet face-to-face and make things right.

When believers are encouraged and united, they will have the **“full riches of complete understanding.”** As we take responsibility for one another, we'll understand and know Christ more fully. As we get to know Him better, we'll discover treasures of

wisdom and knowledge, which are hidden in Christ. Lost people cannot understand the real meaning of life because they don't have Christ. It's hidden from them until they bow before His supremacy.

While the false teachers taught that secret knowledge was reserved only for those who were initiated into their mysteries, Paul tells them to be fully assured of their relationship with Christ. Genuine wisdom is centered in a person, not in facts written on paper. The key to obtaining this treasure is found in the final purpose statement.

6. Delight in Obedience

Let's focus on **verses 4-5**: **"I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is."** Just as one germ can infect the entire body, Paul recognized the threat of false teaching. These teachers deceived by using faulty logic and by enticing people with words that sounded good. Their error was carefully packaged and presented. Paul did not focus on fine-sounding arguments in **1 Corinthians 2:4**: **"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power."**

Paul delighted in their obedience. The phrases **"orderly"** and **"firm"** are military terms. Paul is there in spirit, like a general inspecting the troops before battle. Orderly soldiers were those who had no breaks or breaches in their ranks. It's the picture of the wall builders in Nehemiah, who worked as a team, with their swords at their side (see **Nehemiah 4:18**). The emphasis of **"order"** is on individuality. Everyone is doing his or her part. **"Firmness"** points to a **"solid front,"** with the focus on corporate strength, as the soldiers line up in battle formation.

This military terminology helps us see that through our discipline and obedience we can be prepared for any kind of battle. We must each do our part, and we must stand united.

Inventory

How are you doing in each of these six areas? Let me list them again.

Are you suffering joyfully for the gospel?

Are you serving according to your calling?

Are you moving people to maturity?

Are you working wholeheartedly with His energy?

Are you enriching the lives of others?

Are you delighting in obedience?

If you feel a bit aimless, or even bored in your life, then reenlist for active duty in God's army. It's much better to do battle together than to battle each other, and it's much better to understand your purpose than to go on a walk with a bunch of penguins