

New Year New Start, Part 5

Jeremiah 31:3; Ephesians 1:4-5; Genesis 1:27

Acts 1:8; Ephesians 2:10; John 10:10

John 15:5; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

1. Determination.

- Philippians 3:14; Hebrews 12:1; Acts 14:20; 2 Timothy 4:7-8

2. Direction.

*** You must have a plan.**

- Colossians 1:29

*** You must be persistent.**

- 1 Corinthians 15:58

3. Discipline.

- Colossians 3:17; 2 Timothy 2:1-5

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West Valley Church
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New Year, New Start 2021

Part Five

In a new national survey, 18-24-year-olds report that having a clear purpose in life is a big part of being a "real" adult. The problem is, most young people don't feel like they've found that sense of purpose. More than 86% of young adults say that making decisions in line with their purpose makes them an adult. But only 43% say they have a clear picture of what they want in life, 36% say their career path aligns with life purpose, and only 30% know why they are here.

Christine B. Whelan, a professor at University of Wisconsin-Madison, in her blog "Seek Your Purpose Before Your Paycheck," makes this conclusion: "This [study] isn't good news: Coasting is existing, not thriving. The majority of young adults who say they don't have a clear picture of what they want in life also say they are existing but not thriving, while those with purpose more often say they are thriving."¹

This study was done of young adults, but I'm sure the results wouldn't be that far off if they studied just about any age group today. Young adults intuitively know that they are not here just to coast through life, they are here for a purpose, they want to make a difference in this world, they want to know that their life has meaning. A lot of older adults are coasting as well, but the difference is that many older adults have grown apathetic or cynical or amnesic about their purpose.

I remember as a young man in my twenties when I worked for the State Police, there was a middle-aged trooper who told me, "Here's what life is all about: you work at a job you hate, so you make enough money to buy the things you love and then retire and enjoy those things. That's it." In the brashness that only a twenty-something can have, I told this guy who was one of my superiors, "You're wrong! What a miserable existence you just described! Every one of us is here to make a difference in the world."

Today you can call me a brash fifty-something but I *still* believe that. And the reason I believe that is because that's what God tells me in His Word: that God has a powerful and unique purpose for *every* person, and that is what we are going to look at today. God wants to give you a life that thrives, not simply exists or coasts. You have an important difference to make in this world, and the world needs you now more than ever!

Today we continue in our series called "New Year, New Start," learning how to live this year to the fullness that Christ has for us, pandemic and politics notwithstanding.

Before we jump into this, let me establish a couple of things in your mind: first of all, you must realize that God made you to love you. God says to you in his Word:

¹ Christine B. Whelan, "Seek Your Purpose Before Your Paycheck," Acculturated blog (5-23-16)

“I have loved you with a love that lasts forever. And so with unfailing love, I have drawn you to myself.” (Jeremiah 31:3, ceb)

God has always loved you and always will. In fact, the Bible also tells us:

“Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.” (Ephesians 1:4-5, nlt)

God created you out of his love for you. You were created to be loved by God. God brought you into this world to be in a special relationship with him, unlike anything else in all creation.

You were created to enjoy a personal relationship with God, and that he created you in his image, or his likeness, and that means the heart that beats in you matches the heartbeat of love that God has for you and for the world. This makes you special:

“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27, niv)

And because you and I were made in his image and likeness, we have the same drive, the same ambition, the same purpose that God has. We were created to participate in the advancement of God’s Kingdom. Jesus calls us to participate in this Kingdom building:

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8, nlt)

The Bible also says:

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

Your purpose in this life, the difference you are to make in this world is the most significant, expansive, far-reaching, longest lasting difference that anyone can ever make. Listen to what 1 Thessalonians 1:4 says in The Message Translation:

“God not only loves you very much but also has put his hand on your for something special.” (1 Thessalonians 1:4)

It’s true, and here it is: *You are here to advance the Good News of the Kingdom of God’s love in this world.* When you do *that*, you are making a direct, tangible difference in this world that lasts for eternity. It’s not just for a season or for a while; the difference you make is forever.

Super Bowl quarterback Tom Brady has set all kinds of incredible records in the NFL. (Saying that made me throw up in my mouth a little bit). As much as I hate to acknowledge it, it’s true. He holds records in most combined passing yards (91,452), regular season touchdown passes (581), career touchdowns (661), most ProBowl selections (14, tied with Payton Manning), leader in quarterback wins (263), playoff wins (33), and most Super Bowl MVP awards (4). He’s the oldest player to be named Super Bowl MVP (39) and NFL MVP (40) and the oldest to win the Super Bowl as the starting quarterback (41) and the only

quarterback named to two first-team all-decade teams (2000s and 2010s).² Those are some incredible stats, and he's not done; he'll probably set some more today. I'm sure those records will take a very long time for someone else to surpass. But the point is that eventually those records will be broken. As great as you might think Tom Brady is, he won't be that great forever. Sooner or later someone will break those records.

But the kind of impact God wants *you* to make will last far longer than any athlete's record; the difference you make will result in changed lives that lasts forever.

God means for us to thrive with lives of meaning and fulfillment. Jesus said:

"I came so that they could have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest." (John 10:10, ceb).

So please understand that the presumption, the premise, the presupposition, the precursor to a life of thriving eternal significance is to have been changed – transformed – made eternally alive through Christ. If you want to live a life of significance in this new year, you must be born again – that means you have accepted what Jesus has done by dying on the cross and then rising from the dead – out of his great love for you. Accepting that new life in Christ is the only way you or I are going to live a life of significance in this world. Jesus said:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can't do anything." (John 15:5, ceb)


A life of significance does not happen apart from being in Christ. It will not happen by accident; you must pursue it, in Christ, on purpose.

The Apostle Paul wrote a great deal about the significance in life that we can have, because this Kingdom of God purpose was his life's passion. He describes his approach to life's purpose in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. This is the primary passage we'll learn from today, so would you stand with me as I read it? This is what he wrote:

"Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified." (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, niv)

Thank you; you can have a seat. That is such a motivating passage of Scripture. In fact, the first time I read that, I was a brand new Christian in the fall of my senior year of high school. I was on the football team, and our coach had a bulletin board in the locker room that we could post motivational statements on. Well, I thought it was so cool that the Bible gave this analogy for our spiritual lives that I copied it and posted it on the motivational bulletin board, and then offered to hold a Bible Study and prayer time for anyone else who wanted to learn how to use their athletic training as motivation to pursue a higher purpose – a life of significance in Christ. I'm happy to say that at least three other guys on the football team accepted Christ that year.

²[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Brady#:~:text=Brady%20holds%20many%20quarterback%20records,season%20passing%20yards%20\(79%2C204\).](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Brady#:~:text=Brady%20holds%20many%20quarterback%20records,season%20passing%20yards%20(79%2C204).)

What we learn from Paul's statement is that, first of all, to live a meaningful life we must  have...

1. ***Determination.***

Paul said, "Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!" Paul is saying, "Don't give up. Don't quit. Run with determination, and determine to win."

Runner's World magazine (8/91) told the story of Beth Anne DeCiantis's attempt to qualify for the 1992 Olympic Trials marathon. At that time, a female runner had to complete the 26-mile, 385-yard race in less than two hours, 45 minutes to compete at the Olympic Trials.

Beth started strong but began having trouble around mile 23. She reached the final straightaway at 2:43, with just two minutes left to qualify. Two hundred yards from the finish, she stumbled and fell. Dazed, she stayed down for twenty seconds. The crowd yelled, "Get up!" The clock was ticking--2:44, less than a minute to go.

Beth Anne staggered to her feet and began walking. Five yards short of the finish, with 10 seconds to go, she fell again. She began to crawl, the crowd cheering her on, and crossed the finish line on her hands and knees. Her time? Two hours, 44 minutes, 57 seconds.

Talk about determination! Run the race of your Christian life like that! Give every day all that you have to give to the purposes of Christ's Kingdom. God has given you one life to live – live it all out for him, every day. That's why Paul said:

"I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us." (Philippians 3:14, nlt)

Jesus Christ is calling us to live a life of significance for God's Kingdom every day; so be determined to do that. The Bible also tells us in Hebrews:

"Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1, niv)

One of the greatest tragedies in the world is to meet someone who possesses talent and brains and potential but they are simply coasting through life because they have no ambition, no determination – they are just willing to settle for a life of mediocrity. Don't be that person.

If there was any single word that might describe the Apostle Paul, it is this word, "determination." He didn't just coast through life; he *attacked* it. In Acts 14, Paul was preaching to a crowd in a town called Lystra. Some of his opponents and enemies were able to turn the crowd against him and they stoned him, dragged him outside the city and left him for dead. As soon as Paul returned to consciousness, the Bible says:

"After the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city." (Acts 14:20, niv)

He went back to the very place and people that just tried to kill him! He had such a burning desire to introduce people to Jesus that even the threat of death and mortal injury couldn't keep him down. Talk about determination! No wonder Paul could say at the end of his life:

"I have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. At last the champion's wreath that is awarded for righteousness is waiting for me. The Lord, who is the righteous judge, is going to give it to me on that day. He's giving it not only to me but also to all those (like us at West Valley Church) who have set their heart on waiting for his appearance." (2 Timothy 4:7-8, niv)

In other words, that prize is available to everyone who is determined to live for Jesus.

Paul was running his race to win, and he encourages you and me to do the same.

Second, to live a meaningful life we must have...

2. ***Direction.***

Paul said, "So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete". One translation says it this way: "I do not run like a man running aimlessly..." We *must* have direction, and that direction is in following Christ.

Do you remember the story of *Alice in Wonderland*? There is a scene in that story where Alice asks the Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" The cat replies, "That depends a good deal on where you want to go." Alice says, "I don't much care where..." and the cat replies, "Then it doesn't matter which way you go." Alice says that she just wants to get somewhere, and Cheshire Cat tells her, "Oh, you're sure to do that if you only walk long enough."

We are certain to end up somewhere. The important question you must ask yourself is, "Where am I going?" Having direction in life means that...

you must have a *plan*.

Every coach enters the game with a plan designed to help his or her team win. If he or she has to make changes, the plan continues to provide the foundation for the team's strategy. It's also true for our church, and for your life. We may not always have an exact step by step blueprint, and God doesn't expect us to. Life will throw us curves. But it is essential for each of us to know the overall mission by which we and God can accomplish the most in our lives, and that plan is this: to live for God and introduce people to Jesus. Paul said, "to accomplish this plan, or:

"To get this done I toil and struggle, using the mighty strength which Christ supplies and which is at work in me." (Colossians 1:29, gnt)

You do the work; Christ provides the strength.

It also means...

you must be *persistent*.

You cannot accomplish anything in life without persistence, especially anything of eternal significance.

Heisman trophy winner Herschel Walker once said, “My God-given talent is my ability to stick with something longer than anyone else.” That’s exactly what the Apostle Paul was telling us to do when he said:

“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:58, niv)

Having a plan and being persistent is key to staying in the right direction for living a life of significance for the Kingdom of God. It means you are found at the end of your life in Christ, giving as much or more as you did at the start. We must finish strong with determination and direction.

Finally, if you and I want to have this most meaningful life of purpose, you must have...

3. ***Discipline.***

Remember in that passage that Paul said, “All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.” Whatever it is we are doing in life, we ought to be doing it for God. We should do it well and train ourselves to do it even better. In Paul’s letter to the church in Colosse, in the middle of an entire chapter on living the holy, perfect life, he wrote:

“Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:17, niv)

Doing everything in the name of Jesus means that we are doing it *for* Jesus, just *like* Jesus would do it, in the power the Spirit provides. That means having the discipline to do your best and do whatever it takes to become your best – in Christ and for Christ.

Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, “If a man is to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause and say, ‘Here lived a great streetsweeper who did his job well.’” Part of the way we glorify God is by doing our very best at *everything* we do.

Now let me pause and caution you about something: living your life this way, with determination, direction, and discipline, will not cause God to like you more than he already does. God could not love you more than he already does. He loves you – right now, just the way you are, and not as you think you should be. There is nothing you could do to make him love you less, and there is nothing you could do to make him love you more. He already loves you with everything he has – with the life of his One and Only Son.

I loved that age when our boys were little – when they were just starting out school. It was such a fun age. But would I love them more if they stayed that age? Did I love them less as they grew? I loved every moment of their lives, and I still love every moment of their lives. They’ve gone from being those sweet little boys to one who is a pastor, one’s a doctor, and

one's soon to be a physician. They are accomplishing great things and they are doing it for the Lord. Do I love them more than I used to? I couldn't possibly! If they failed at something, would I love them less? I couldn't possibly!

My friend, in your determination, direction, and discipline to live fully for the Lord, God will never stop loving you. If you fail, he won't love you less. If you sin, he will still forgive you when you ask him to, and he will dust you off, put you on your feet, and his Spirit will keep working through you to make a difference in this world.

It is wrong for us to think that we can achieve holiness or the perfect life on our own strength and by our own efforts or goodness. But it is also wrong to neglect a disciplined approach to our spiritual lives and for the rest of our lives. After all, we want to be disciples of Christ, and "disciple" means a "disciplined learner." That means we are going to be disciplined to always grow, always learn, always be more like Christ, always live for him in greater and greater ways by the power of the Holy Spirit, always introducing more and more people to Jesus. So we will be disciplined to read God's Word every day, to pray, to be faithful in worship and giving and growing in classes and small groups. We will be disciplined, and ever more so: Paul wrote to Timothy, the young adult that he was discipling:

"Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules." (2 Timothy 2:1-5, nlt)

God's plan for us is to live lives that are full of meaning and powerful with purpose, according to his rules, according to his ways. Our search for significance begins when we commit ourselves to wholeheartedly following Jesus. This Christian life does not happen by accident. Your ability to live a full and abundant and purposeful life in this new year will not happen accidentally, not by you coasting through life. It is the result of living life on purpose, with determination, direction, and discipline. It is true for you, and it is true for our church. This is what it means to introduce people to Jesus Christ, to equip people with a faith that works, and to live as people with purpose. This is our West Valley Church mission.

Pray

Stand for Benediction:

"Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord [always doing your best and doing more than is needed], being *continually* aware that your labor [even to the point of exhaustion] in the Lord is not futile *nor* wasted [it is never without purpose]." (1 Corinthians 15:58, amp)