

SHAPED FOR SERVING GOD The Purpose Driven Life – Part 5

Today we're continuing our 40 Days of Purpose. We're looking at God's 4th purpose for our lives...SERVICE. Let's start by reading Eph. 2:20 together: "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do".

When we kicked off this course we considered our position at the head of creation. How we are carefully and wonderfully made. God's masterpiece. But we are not merely works of art or fantastic machines. We are worked and crafted, for a purpose.

Paul reminds the Ephesians that we were created TO... do good works. We weren't created just to BE, but to DO. We weren't created to do whatever we please. We were created to do good works. And, notice this, not just *any* good works. God has prepared in advance the good works he has made us for. His purpose for us is quite specific.

We were created by the master craftsmen to do specific/prepared good works. And guess what? He has equipped us perfectly for our assignment. The things I enjoy most in life are the things I am good at. Does anyone relate to that? We find enjoyment and fulfillment when we do what we are made for.

The world is searching for self-esteem, self-worth, and significance. But they're looking in the wrong place! You don't get self-worth from success, because someone will always do a better job. You don't get your self-esteem from status or sex or salary. Self-esteem comes from service. Jesus taught that the only way to find your life is to give it away. The greatest thrill in life is to be used by God, to be used in serving Him.

Each year at CJ's, we run a course called Inreach 101, which is designed to help us understand the shape God has given us. We look at each parts of our shape: our spiritual gifts, passions, personal style and experiences. God put these things together to give you a unique shaped for a unique purpose. Your purpose may have a specific definition but it will always be a way of serving Him.

I'm not looking at our God-given shape today because the book will break this idea down over the coming week and you could come to Inreach 101. We have recently run an Inreach 101 course and not many people attended but, if this subject grabs you, please let me know and we'll see if we can run it adhoc.

What I want to highlight today is (i) that God has made us unique and (ii) that our uniqueness is not for our benefit. Lets look at the next verse: 1 Pet. 4:10, "Each of us should use whatever gift he's received to make a lot of money". Oh! No, that's not what it says! It says we're to use whatever God has given us to... serve others! Your talents are not for your benefit.

Your purpose is to be what God made you to be. God gave you your gifts and talents and abilities and background and experiences for the benefit of other people. You should use them to serve others. You might want to write this down: "*My fourth purpose in life is to serve God by serving others*". That's why we are alive. We were not made merely to consume creation, but to contribute to it. We're all meant to make a contribution.

Look at 2 Tim. 1:9: “It is He who saved us and chose us for His holy work [here again, the Bible says we were saved to do holy works. Why?], not because we deserved it, but because that was His plan.” Paul is clear, God’s purpose in saving us was that we might do His holy work. We are created to serve, we’re shaped to serve, we’re saved to serve, we’re gifted to serve. We were put here to serve God. And God says, the way we serve Him is by serving other people. Some people want to serve God but don’t want to serve others. Impossible. We serve God by serving others.

The Church has a word for serving others: “ministry”. Like worship, fellowship and discipleship, this is a badly misunderstood word. When I say “minister” most people think of priest. Someone who wears a dog collar, or a robe, and talks like [SING SONG HIGH TO LOW] “Tea and coffee will be served, at the back”. That kind of stuff!

Actually, every believer is a minister. Piers is a gifted pastor. Not every believer is a pastor, but every believer is a minister. Ministry simply means using your God-given shape to help somebody else in the name of God. So, any time you use your talents, abilities, background or experiences to help somebody else, you are ministering. You’re a minister.

If someone says “I believe I am called to ministry”, we understand this as a call to full-time work for the church. Well, guess what, we are all called to ministry. If you are called to salvation, you are called to serve.

Now, do you remember what I said on the first Sunday of this series, that life is preparation for what? For eternity, right! [I love this word, eternity. Just shut your eyes for a moment and imagine eternity. Cough! Its bigger than that! It must be, anything you can imagine is finite. Eternity is bigger] One of the things you’re going to do in eternity is serve God and serve others. God wants you to spend your 60, 80, 90 years practicing what you’re going to do in eternity. He wants you to learn how to serve, and practice, practice, practice.

The most important thing you’ll ever do with your life is serving God. It’s far more important than your career, your hobbies, anything else you can think of because they aren’t going to last. But this is. You were put here on earth to practice serving.

The good news is that God gave us a model to work towards. He came to earth in the person of his son Jesus Christ and said “This is how you do it. Watch Me. This is what I want you to do with your life”. We learnt last week that we are created to be like Christ. What did Christ do while He was here on earth? He served.

Let’s read the next verse together: Matt. 20:28, “Jesus said, ‘Your attitude must be like My own, for I did not come to be served, but to serve.’” Now listen to this, your God-given shape determines what your ministry will be and where it will be. But its your attitude that determines your maturity. Big difference. If you want to know what God wants you to do with your life? Look at your spiritual gifts, passions, personality and experiences. But your attitude, your heart, determines your maturity. You might do Inreach 101 and realise, wow, you are equipped to be the master pastor. But it will makes no difference to you or anyone else if you maintain the heart of a pop idol. How can we develop a servant heart like Jesus?

You might want to write this down. Number one, serving like Jesus means being available. One day, Jesus was walking down to Jericho and (Matt. 20:30-32): “Two blind men shouted ‘Lord, have mercy on us! Jesus stopped and called them. ‘What do you want me to do for you?’.”

Underline the word “stopped”. If you want to be used by God, if you want to serve God, you must be willing to be interrupted. All of Jesus’ healing ministry, to – the blind man, the lame man, all the sick people, the paralyzed man, the dead child – followed from interruptions. His first miracle? Interrupted at a wedding. Perhaps like me you often pray that you may walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Well, how about learning to stop in the footsteps of Jesus. Almost all the ministry Jesus had came when he allowed interruption.

What did King Solomon say on the matter. “Never tell your neighbours to wait until tomorrow if you can help them now.” Servant-hearted people don’t procrastinate. They’re immediately sensitive to the problem, and so they act spontaneously.

We must be available. Willing to stop and say “OK God, what do You want me to do?” The wounded will not wait. They need help now.

In all honesty, we know we’re not often not available. Why? Let me suggest three possible barriers.

Number one: self-centeredness. The Bible says, “Forget yourself long enough to lend a helping hand.” (Phil. 2:4). Any time you see a need right in front of you, God is giving you the opportunity to practice serving. You have a God-given opportunity to learn to be like Jesus Christ. Don’t miss it!

The number one enemy of compassion is busyness. We get so busy, we don’t have time to serve. Our agenda, plans, dreams, goals and ambitions cannot be disturbed by the needs of others. This is how the world lives. We should not conform to this pattern. I confess I often fail in this area. I have so much work on, I worked all day yesterday and only started preparing this talk at 6 last night. As a result, I did not ring my brother, though I know he has just competed in a race that is important to him, and I did not ring a good friend of mine, though I have not spoken to him since we returned from a holiday he gave me. In January this year, this same friend and my mother both complaining about my lack of contact so badly I ended up in tears. This is not God’s pattern for living, and the reasons are obvious. We must not let busyness prevent us serving others.

Jesus let himself be interrupted so he could serve others. If we really have a servant’s heart, like Jesus, we won’t mind being interrupted because our agenda is God’s agenda. And if God’s agenda involves an interruption, hey, cool. If God wants to mix things up and bring someone unexpected into our day... Bring them on!” If you work in a service industry you will understand this.

As a lawyer it is a rare day when my plans are not disturbed by my clients. I busy enough already and entrenched in something but a client rings with a bigger problem and I drop everything to help them. Sometimes the amount of work gets me down but not the interruptions. That is the job. I am there to serve my clients needs and it wouldn’t be much

good to them if I said, sorry, I am busy. We should have this attitude whenever we are interrupted by church members, family, friends, strangers even. Almost every act of ministry Jesus did, He did when He was interrupted. Our self-centeredness gets in the way of serving us like Jesus.

A second barrier...is perfectionism. Wanting every thing to be perfect. We think, okay, "When things settle down and I get things sorted just right, then I'll serve." Let's read Eccl. 11:4 together: "If you wait for perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done." Does anyone have a confession to make?

Christ-like servants, do the best they can with what they have. They don't wait. We have a made an idol out of excellence. Some people say "Well, you know, if you can't do it first class, don't even bother." That is rubbish. We all have weaknesses, faults, failures. But God uses us all. God doesn't use perfect people because there aren't any! God uses normal people. Look at us. We have relaunched CJ's with snazzy banners, together we are running a slick Purpose Driven Life course, new people have opened their homes and more people are getting involved all the time.

Why? Because normal people said, "My house isn't perfect, and I'm not perfect, my schedule is not perfect. I don't perfectly know the Bible, but I could do this!" And God is blessing it. The bad news for today is, things aren't going to settle down! God says, "Don't wait for perfect conditions, just start serving.

A third barrier to serving like Jesus is: materialism. Jesus said, "No servant can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money." (Lk. 16:13). He didn't say, "You should not serve both God and money." He said, "You cannot." You must decide whether you want to be rich or you want to be *blessed*. To serve like Jesus your number one priority must be God not money and not both. Now, if God wants to give you wealth, that's great, but it is cannot be the number one goal of your life. If your job is keeping you from having any kind of service to others, you need to make some kind of adjustment.

I didn't really serve others in the church until I came to CJ's. As a new Christian in Bristol I just went to church to get fed. I didn't think I was equipped to serve. I quickly got wrapped up in myself and fell away from God. In Bristol and then in Nottingham, I attended big fat churches with over 500 people. They had it all going on. The singing was spectacular and they had every imaginable ministry. They didn't seem to need me so I sat at the back. My faith became less meaningful and I fell into sin.

Thank God, he took me for six months reflection in Africa. He made it pretty clear that when I came to London I needed a church I would get involved in. I came back and walked straight into CJ's. My faith was pretty rough at the edges but we were small and Julio forced me into leadership. It has been challenging but each of my responsibilities and each of the opportunities to practice my faith CJ's has given me has helped me grow. 4 years later I'm in the pulpit! You will not grow by sitting on these chairs. We need to make space for service in our lives. I thank God he's helped me do so.

Serving like Jesus means overcoming the barriers of self-centredness, perfectionism and materialism and making ourselves available.

Serving like Jesus also means being grateful. Grateful that we get the opportunity to serve.

Remember Lazarus. Lazarus had died and Jesus went to see him. The people assumed he'd come for the funeral, but Jesus had come to do ministry, to raise Lazarus from the dead. Jesus could have prayed a silent prayer. But He chose to pray aloud so that we would hear. "Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank You that You heard me. I know that You always hear Me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here.'" Jesus wanted us to know that he was grateful that God heard Him.

He had an attitude of gratefulness in everything He did. Now you might think, "I'd be grateful too, if I could raise people from the dead." But Jesus was grateful when He was criticized and when things were not easy in ministry. He maintained a constant attitude of gratefulness. So did Paul. Paul said, "I thank Jesus Christ because He trusted me. He gave me this work of serving Him." King David had it too. David encouraged us to: "Serve the Lord with gladness."

Why? Because our service is not out of a sense of obligation but with a sense of delight at the great opportunity that God's given to us? Whatismore, we serve Him with gratefulness because He's given life to us through Jesus Christ. If He never did anything else for us, that is enough to be grateful for the rest of our lives.

There are several things that get in the way of an attitude of gratefulness. One of them, is comparing and criticizing.

When you compare yourself to others, when you criticize others, you create a barrier that gets prevents us all being grateful. The Bible asks, "Who are you to criticize someone else's servant? The Lord will determine whether His servant has been successful." We're all His servants. And we are all on the same team, working to see his glory, so competing is quite ridiculous.

You may be wondering where I got this sexy tan? Okay, freckles. Last week a friend of mine took me to the Bahamas. He won a prize and his fiancée couldn't go and I was next in line. Thank God. A free trip to the Bahamas, five star hotel and \$150 dollars pocket money. Wow. I was so excited when I arrived. The heat, the palm trees, the sea breeze. Our hotel room looked out over the kitchens but hey ho. Then we discovered that most of our group had sea views, one couple even had a suite. Suddenly, I didn't like our room as much. How ridiculous. Our human nature is to compare what we have to others. If we give into this temptation, our envy will steal the joy and the gratitude out of our lives.

There's no need to compare and criticize. We should live for God's approval, not other people's approval, for an audience of One. Both comparing and criticizing get in the way of gratefulness.

The second thing that kills gratefulness is a wrong motive. Jesus said, "When you do good deeds, don't try to show off. If you do, you won't get a reward from your Father in heaven". Self-promotion and servanthood don't mix, but it's easy to get them mixed up. Our service of others is often self-serving. We need to be honest about that. We serve to get others to like us, to be admired, to achieve our own goals. Sometimes we serve as sort of a bargaining chip with God. "Look God, I serve you so you'd better take care of me here." Many kinds of wrong

motivations. We're serving, but all the time we're serving, we're thinking about ourselves, not God.

We all have wrong motives. How do you know? Gratitude. When you lose a sense of gratitude in your life, something is wrong with your motivation. Gratitude is a really strong indicator. I believe the minute we lose gratitude we should know something is wrong with the motivation of service in our life.

I wasn't always a cheerful giver as a kid. I remember not wanting to chop logs for the fire and avoided it all day. As it was getting dark, my mum explained this was a compulsory job. Annoyed I went outside. I chopped for an hour or so, maybe even started to enjoy it and then came back in. I couldn't believe it when I found my mum more annoyed than when I had left. I couldn't understand at all. I had done the work. Serving others without gratitude is as annoying to God as it was to my mother. We have so much to be grateful for we should never lose an attitude of gratefulness. If we do our service is meaningless. Remember Corinthians 13. The Paul says that "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

If we want to learn to serve like Jesus, we must learn to serve gratefully with a generous heart. And, we must learn to be faithful.

This means: don't give up. Don't quit in the middle of your assignment. At the end of Jesus' ministry on earth, he said (John 17:4), "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work that You gave me to do," underline by completing. Jesus was faithful in fulfilling His service. He didn't give up. He persisted till the end. To be like Jesus means serving as long as you're alive. We may retire from our jobs someday, but we'll never retiring from ministry.

(1Cor. 4:2) "The one thing required of servants is that they be faithful."

God will help us stay faithful if we ask him. What other motivation do we have to stay faithful? I have mentioned our gratitude for all God's forgiven in our lives. The truth is: if God never did another thing for me, I owe Him the rest of my life.

Then, there is trust and faith in the future rewards God has promised those who serve him faithfully. God has said, "You're going to be rewarded forever in eternity for what you do here on earth in serving Me by serving others."

Then, we should reflect that its what we do for God that really matters. Most of what we do in life doesn't matter. But any time are serving in Jesus' name, it matters. Let's read 1Cor. 15:58 together, "Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for Him is a waste of time or effort" Nothing: it all matters. Why? Because in God's eyes, there is no little service. He said, "Even if you give a cup of cold water in my name to a child, that counts."

There is a difference between prominence and importance. My nose is more prominent than my heart but believe me I would rather lose my nose than my heart.

Do you know the name of the person who laid out your seat this morning? God does. Just because I am on stage does not make me more important to God. I am more prominent than

the chair guy but not more important. Christ-like servants don't care if they are anonymous because they are serving God, not themselves. Real servants do every task with equal dedication because they know it all matters. Don't mistake anonymous with insignificant. The battle you have with your carnal desires at home tonight may be far more important than the quality of polish on your shoes right now.

[Several years ago two teenage boys tried to come into a church service at night, much like this, only it was packed out and they couldn't find any seats. So they turned around and decided to leave. But one usher said, "Come on, guys. I'll find you a seat." And that usher personally escorted them down and found them two seats in the middle. That night both of those boys accepted Christ. One of them was Billy Graham who has now led millions of people to Christ. Do you think that usher is going to get any credit in heaven? I'll say!]

Have you ever wondered why you're here at CJ's? I'll tell you. You're here because God knew you had something to give to CJ's. He did not bring you here just to sit back and enjoy. He brought you here to serve. He knew that you have something – some background, talent, skill, ability, contact, network, interest, hobby, whatever. Something CJ's needs.

Next week John boy is running our ministry fair during the service. This will be a chance to consider the different ministries we run at CJ's and get involved with one of them. They are only umbrella divisions though. If God has put something on your heart that doesn't seem to fit let us know and we will try and help you. We're also going to ask you to fill in a brief questionnaire listing your details, your talents, your time, and what team you'd like to join. We need what God has sent you to bring us. Number one, we are here to serve each other.

I'm ending with this question. How will God use you? .

Close your eyes and imagine this.

This school is hit by a meteor, right now. You are brought before God.

God will say to you, "What did you do with what I gave you - your talents, abilities, background, experiences, freedom, education, family experiences? What did you do with the shape I gave you?"

You answer or not, it doesn't matter, he knows already. What does he then say:

(a) "Well done good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things so; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness."

or (b) "Do you think I put you on earth to live for yourself? I put you here to serve Me by serving others. Leave my presence forever."

You may thinking nobody's watching what you do, but God is. Look at Hebrews 6:10: "He will not forget how hard you've worked for Him and how you've shown your love to Him." How? "By caring for other Christians".

Is God going to be able to say "well done" to you?

More than anything else, I want God to be able to say that about us.

How available are you to serve? How grateful are you to serve? How faithful are you to serve?

Lets pray together

Father, I thank you that you shaped me to serve You, by serving others.

Forgive me for when I've ignored the opportunities to serve you, which you prepared in advance for me.

Help me to see the opportunities to serve in the interruptions of life.

Help me to make time for what matters most.

Thank you for all you've given me. I want to serve You freely, and gratefully, and faithfully.

I want to practice serving so I can hear You say "Well done, good and faithful servant".

In Your name I pray, Amen.
