

Savoring God's Word

A Meditation on Paul's Purpose Statements

Philippians 3:8, 10-11; Colossians 2:2-3; 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, 19-20

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This meditation exercise on Paul's purpose statements is especially for those wishing to move beyond mediocrity with Christ. You might want to use it when you want to discern God's purpose for your life (especially if you've been reading [Living a Purpose-Full Life](#).)

If you wish to have a group meditate on the passage together, the instructions for the group leader are in italics. If you wish to use it alone, ignore those instructions. This meditation roughly follows the pattern of *lectio divina*, but also includes elements from the Ignatian style of Scripture meditation. For more information about how to meditate on Scripture, see [Savoring God's Word](#) or the recording [Meditating on Scripture](#) (scroll to bottom of page).

WARMING UP (5-10 minutes)

Center yourself by breathing in and out several times. Relax your neck and then take time to let your muscles relax. Set aside each thought that distracts you. Then read aloud this prayer penned by Florence Nightingale and sit in the quiet. If you wish, read it aloud again.

Oh God, you put into my heart this great desire to devote myself to the sick and sorrowful; I offer it to you. Do with it what is for your service. . . . O Lord, even now I am trying to snatch the management of your world from your hands. Too little have I looked for something higher and better than my own work -- the work of supreme Wisdom, which uses us whether we know it or not.¹

Reflect for a moment. **Which phrase from the prayer (if any) speaks to you in your situation?**

Group leader: After group members have had a chance to greet each other, read the centering instructions above. Before reading the prayer aloud, ask the "quiet question" printed in bold. Then read the prayer and let group members reflect quietly for a few minutes. Repeat the question and ask them to share their thoughts in a sentence or two. Anyone who wishes to pass may do so.

READING the PASSAGE (15-20 minutes)

Read silently the passage printed below, noting the explanations in the right column.

Group leader: Ask a group member to read the passage below aloud. Suggest that other group members might want to close their eyes and listen.

PAUL'S STATEMENTS OF PURPOSE

ITALICIZED WORDS &

¹Florence Nightingale as quoted in Veronica Zundel ed. *The Eerdman's Book of Famous Prayers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1983), p. 76.

Philippians 3:8, 10-11; Colossians 2:2-3,
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GOALS WORTH LOSING EVERYTHING ELSE

Philippians 3

8 I consider *everything* a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. . . . 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

RELATIONSHIPS & HOW PAUL VIEWED THEM

Colossians 2

2 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, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

1 Thessalonians 2

11 For you know that we dealt with *each of you* as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging *you* to live lives worthy of God, who calls *you* into his kingdom and glory. 19 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not *you*? 20 Indeed, *you* are our glory and joy.

If you haven't read the notes in the right column, read them silently now. Take a minute to consider the following questions.

Group leader: After the passage is read, ask group members to read silently the explanations in the right column and then to jot down answers to the questions below. After a few minutes, have them choose one question and share their answer to that question in a sentence or two. Or they may pass, if they wish. Explain that this is not a time for discussion, but for reporting responses to the questions.

PAUL'S PURPOSE IN LIFE

1. In the first passage, notice the emphasis on the words: "Christ," "Lord," and "Jesus." How would you describe Paul's purpose in relation to God?

- How did that relationship with God affect other things in life?
- How did it affect his willingness to suffer?

2. In the second and third passages, look at the places where the words, "they," "each of you," and "you" occur. Paul was talking about the people he served. How would you describe Paul's purpose as it related to other people?

PURPOSE IN LIFE AFFECTS SERVICE

PHRASES

EVERYTHING Paul, the missionary-writer of these verses, was probably referring back to verses 4-6, in which he listed the high credentials he had as a Jewish leader before he became a Christian. Since his conversion, he had traveled extensively, giving up family and leisure. He wrote these words from a prison cell and so he had also given up his freedom.

THEY The Colossians had been subject to heretical teachings about Christ, which had caused a lot of confusion and no doubt, hurt.

EACH OF YOU The Thessalonian converts were young Christians who had undergone persecution (1:6; 3:1-4, 7, 8).

3. Paul also wrote this phrase, "For me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). In Eugenia Price's book, *Discoveries*, she explored the substitute reasons for living listed below. Check the ones that you have dabbled in at times:

- For me to live is . . . to be religious
- For me to live is . . . to serve other people.
- For me to live is . . . to serve Christ.
- For me to live is . . . to be Christlike.²

What is the difference between living for Christ and living to be Christlike?

4. Paul was a doer, yet he valued knowing Christ above all else. The paradox is that knowing Christ affects everything else. If you were to value Christ above all else, which of the above areas would be affected? (Check as many as you wish.)

- our choice of service
- our attitudes toward co-workers
- our attitude toward our own service
- attitude toward church
- other area: _____

PICTURING the PASSAGE (10-15 minutes)

Before reading the passage again, consider these cues.

CHARACTER & SETTING CUES: PAUL IN PRISON

The Apostle Paul spent some time in dark prison cells (where he may not have had a toilet or been offered food and water, but relied on outsiders to provide it), but when he wrote Philippians and Colossians his prison was a house where he was kept under close guard at all times and was probably chained to a soldier. He was given certain freedoms not offered to most prisoners. He was allowed to write letters and see any visitors he wanted to see.³

Still, what could be a worse situation for a missionary, called to travel the Roman empire planting churches? From the book of Acts, we see that he was good at spearheading movements for Christ in towns worshipping all kinds of idols -- how could he be "wasted" in a Roman prison?

Imagine this intelligent man who had experienced the thrill of missionary work cooped up in a house with Roman guards, wanting desperately to make known the name of Christ to the world. Imagine him closing his eyes and reflecting on the Thessalonians as his hope, joy, and crown in which he would will glory in the presence of the Lord Jesus.

Armed with these cues, read the passage aloud and then close your eyes and ponder one or two of these phrases:

- to know Christ
- the power of his resurrection
- fellowship of sharing in his sufferings
- becoming like him in his death
- have full riches of complete understanding
- know the mystery of God
- Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge

²Eugenia Price, *Discoveries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), pp. 47, 51, 55 and 59.

³*Life Application Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1991), p. 2158.

Or, ponder verse 19, "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not *you*? Picture someone who is your hope, joy and crown, in whom you'll glory.

Group leader: Have group members read these cues and suggestions silently. Then have a group member read the passage aloud while the others ponder one of the phrases.

SOAKING in the PASSAGE (5-15 minutes)

Reflect now on how this Scripture passage touches your life today. Read the passage aloud again and ponder the following question for several minutes: **What word or phrase or image emerges from the passage and stays with you?** If you begin to latch on to something that is most evident, step back a minute and wait to see if anything else emerges.

After several minutes, write about the words or images that resonate with you from the passage. Or, if you wish, try drawing or doodling an abstract symbol or visual image. Engage yourself in it, and then sit quietly with it.

Word or phrase: _____

Image: I hear . . . or, I see . . . _____

Group leader: Have a different group member read the passage aloud and then state the question printed in bold. Ask the group to sit quietly for a while and then fill in the one of the blanks above. After a few minutes, ask group members to read what they've written. Remind them that they may pass if they wish.

PONDERING the INVITATION (5-15 minutes)

Perhaps God is offering you an invitation in this passage to do or be something in the next few days. What might that be? Sit in silence for a few minutes, pondering this question: **What do I sense this passage is calling me to understand or to do differently?**

Group leader: Read the above instructions aloud and after a few minutes, repeat the question printed in bold. Ask group members to respond by saying, I SENSE THIS PASSAGE CALLING ME TO: and then completing that statement with a short phrase. Anyone who wishes to pass may do so.

PRAISING (5-10 minutes)

Respond to God by telling him how you feel about what you sensed or didn't sense during this meditation. **What is it you most want to say to God at this time?** If you need to present questions to God, do so.

Group leader: After allowing a few minutes for private prayer, ask group members to pray for the person on their left. Anyone wishing to pray silently may do so, saying, "I'm praying silently." When they're finished, they can say, "Amen."

DAILY LECTIO:

If you wish, use the above format to meditate on God's word between group meetings. You may wish to focus on today's passage everyday this week or use the following passages:

- Philippians 1:21-26 (Paul's purpose to live for Christ)
- Philippians 2:12-13 (God working in us for a purpose, written from prison)

- Ephesians 1:12; 2:14-16 (purpose of peace, written from prison)
- 1 Corinthians 3:6-10 (about sharing purpose with others)
- 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 (Paul's caring manner in serving others)
- 1 Thessalonians 2:4-7 (Paul's integrity in his service to others)

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