

## **“What’s My Purpose In Life?”**

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Deut 15:7-11

What’s my purpose in life?

This is an age-old question that people have pondered perhaps since the beginning of time. We might be asking the question at many other points, but we often encounter it at times of transition.

Transitions are times when we look around and we don’t recognize the flow of life. We stare at unfamiliarity and we struggle to find our place. We don’t have a lot of experience in the new place.

How we had understood our role in the world in the past no longer seems to fit in this new situation — so we ask questions about our purpose if not verbally, inwardly.

This is when we ask “What really is my life purpose?”

You know the feeling. This happens when we are transitioning into a new job, or moving into a new area. Perhaps it is when we are getting married, or have our first child.

What our purpose is also comes up when we enter the season of empty nest after our youngest child has left home, away at college.

We also ask the question about our life purpose when we retire, and also when we become a grandparent for the first time.

We ask the question throughout our lives.

I remember talking with my grandma when she was in her 90s. She no longer had the role of a parent or a wife, and all of her closest friends had already passed away. She was asking the same question with different words. “I wonder what God wants me to do now.” I have heard Virginia Brisendine at 104 ask the same question in her own way.

We also feel the weight of this question when we face challenges and fail. Maybe we put a lot of time and energy into a project proposal at work. We saw all of the great new opportunities that might come from this new idea, and we were in our zone making the pitch with all kinds of passion and swagger ... but it totally bombed. Then we are criticized by our co-workers and boss.

We invested ourself in the idea, but now we are left wondering about

our own worth to the company. We think, “If nobody finds value in my contribution here, then what am I even doing here? We are left empty, again asking the question,

What is my purpose in life?

This is an age-old question. It is a human question.

This basic pondering about our purpose takes form in different questions like: Where do I fit? or Does God have a purpose for me?

When we include God in the question, it leads us to other questions, like:

How does God work in the world?

Does God make things happen and control the world? Control my life?

And if God does control things, then what part do I control? If God doesn't, then is God not “all powerful?”

We might ask: What is my role in life, compared with God's? Where does God's role stop and my responsibility start?

### **READ DEUTERONOMY 15:7-11**

In this passage, there is clearly a role that God is playing and a role that people are expected to play.

God is there blessing people, but people are responsible for meeting the needs of the neighbors and strangers with the resources they possess. The role of people is to share, to give, to support, to lend a hand. In fact, the passage says it is our responsibility to remain “openhanded” toward the poor, and those in need.

When people do this, it says that God will bless them.

Let's go a bit deeper to understand more fully what is going on in this passage.

It talks about the seventh year and describes it as the “Year of Remission.” Remission is the cancelling or satisfying of debt owed.

This was part of the law that the people received from God through Moses after they left slavery in Egypt. In Egypt, they were commanded to make bricks seven days a week, 365 day a year without an opportunity for a day off, a sabbath.

Now that they were free, God told them that it was important to include in the routine of life a break, a sabbath every seventh day. This was for them to remember that their identity was not wrapped up only in their labor.

When they took a break, they turned their attention toward their God who said that they were good enough just as they were, even without the purpose of work.

This break, or sabbath was also integrated as a pattern into their lives in other ways. It wasn't only this weekly routine of taking a break from labor. The break was for agriculture as well. They were to let the land rejuvenate every seventh year by allowing it to rest without planting a crop.

This served a double purpose. The land owner wasn't to plant or harvest anything off the land, but crops would likely come up in the field. These crops were designated for the poor. Farm owners would rotate their fields so that they were always planting and harvesting, and there was also always a field left for the poor to harvest.

This was a practice of justice and provision so that all might have enough.

They went further, beyond economics and agriculture. Every seven years they had what was called the "Year of Release." Every seventh year, all debts were to be cancelled and all slaves were to be set free.

Let's jump ahead for just a moment into the New Testament. The word "release" is the same word used by the people who wrote about Jesus. For these people, the word release is translated "forgiveness" to describe what Jesus did on the cross to release people from the bonds of sin and guilt.

This is the purpose of God — to free people from slavery, bondage whether physically at the hands of others, or inwardly from anything that would have us bound.

Back to the original passage in Deuteronomy, the "Day of Release" was to account for the imbalance in society that they had experienced in Egypt as slaves, where the rulers (Pharaoh and his entourage) became very wealthy and accumulated great power on the backs of the general population and many slaves.

Now after being freed from slavery in Egypt, many of the Hebrew people continued to be bound in other ways. As a result of greed, some would amass great wealth and power, holding others in their debt.

This was like going back into slavery in Egypt, and was not healthy for society. So, God gave them a way to balance and correct this greed. Every seventh year, the

Year of Remission,” slaves would be set free and debts were cancelled. Those who had been oppressed would be able to gain a sigh of relief.

You see, God’s plan for people is that there would be a time for relaxation, a time for rejuvenation, a time to be quiet, a time to simply be.

This is the backdrop for the passage in Deuteronomy, and something we need in our fast paced world today.

The more we fill up our attention all week long with stimuli from the world around us — TV, radio, iPhones, tablet, meetings, phone calls, reports, projects, and the like — the more our thoughts and attention are held hostage by those things, the less able we are to recognize our life’s purpose.

Our culture does not value the quite, the pause. Most of our lives are captivated by the world outside us. When we are producing and delivering the goods, so to speak, we think that this is what gives us purpose, and this is who we are. We think that this is all there really is in life — that our life is a sum total of what we produce.

This is the lie that we have believed that keeps us from our life’s

purpose. This lie puts us right back in slavery — making bricks for Pharaoh seven days a week, 365 days a year without nary a chance to even be still for a moment.

However, God’s purpose for us is found in a different direction.

It is in the quiet ... during the break ... during the sabbath ... when we let go of our striving for more ... lay down the tools of our trade ... release the concern about yesterday’s failures or successes ... forget about what is on the schedule for tomorrow ... and be fully present in the presence of God.

It is in this present moment that we discover what has been true about us all along. The purpose of God for our lives is most fully realized in the stillness — this is who we truly are as God made us to be.

Everything else is window dressing — our job, our family, our concerns about the past and the future — all of that is gravy.

Who you really are, the real you, and the real purpose for your life has been within you the whole time, and can only be grasped in the pause in between all the doings of our lives.

It is here in the pause that our full purpose can be grasped. It is here in this stillness that we come to understand more clearly what our role is in the world.

We must go inward to discover who God made us to be. Then we go out and live that purpose.

We can't go out into the world to find our purpose. Our purpose is not out there. It is much closer. It is right within us and always has been.

This doesn't mean we don't work, raise a family, and all of those things in the world, but we do them from a centered place that comes from our **true being** that we have discovered by going within.

Bringing attention inwardly and discovering the purpose that God has planted there will enable us to both enjoy our lives more fully, regardless of what we are doing, as well as align our actions, thoughts, and relationships with this God-given purpose.

This will bring all of our life inside God's design and intention, and we will truly be free!