

# Living on Purpose

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**Bible Text:** Philippians 3:10-12  
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The beginning of a new year is always a great opportunity to stop and to evaluate our lives and if you work in a business, many times a business will evaluate what happened in the year before. What significant went on? What do we need to improve? What was good? What do we look for in the year in front of us?

And as we have, as individuals, as have stepped across the threshold into 2007, it is always helpful for us to stop and to evaluate in our own lives what do we do? Where are we going? What is our purpose? Because we really only have one shot at this thing of living our life right before God. We don't really have opportunities to go back and say, "Let me try that again."

We are grateful for the forgiveness that God gives to us, but life and its purpose is very important.

So what is your purpose in life? Why are you existing on planet earth? How will you know if your life has been successful? It makes no difference if you are in middle school or high school or maybe you have graduated. You are in college or you have stepped out of college and you are beginning the work dimension. Maybe you are in young 20s or 30s or maybe you are midlife someplace or maybe you are on the other side and you begin to wonder: What is the purpose and what am I supposed to be doing with my life now?

Sadly, there are many individuals who really don't know the answer to that question. And yet it is a crucial question.

Now quite a few years ago there was a Scotsman who came over to America to introduce the game of golf to President Ulysses Grant. The Scotsman got down and took the golf ball and carefully placed it on the tee. Then he got out one of his clubs and he swung savagely at the ball and missed the ball, but hit the turf scattering dirt all over the place and even onto President Grant's beard.

Somewhat chagrined, the Scotsman looked at the president and said, "I will try again."

And he did. He tried again with the exact same result.

And after about six tries President Grant looked at the Scotsman and said, "You know, there seems to be a fair amount of exercise in this game, but I fail to see the purpose of the ball."

And sometimes as we go through life it seems that we may be swinging wildly at life, but we have missed the purpose of it. What is the significance of it? Why has God placed us here? How will we know that we have been successful?

That great philosopher Yogi Berra said, "If you don't know where you are going, you are likely to end up someplace else."

And so in life we need to know where are we headed? What is our purpose? What is our significance of our life?

A couple of years ago an individual was doing street interviews of folks who walked down the road and as he would interview the passing pedestrians he asked this question. What is your purpose in life?

One person said, "I can't say that I know the purpose. I think that after I die I will find out what my purpose in life is."

Don't you think that is a little late?

Another one was asked the same question. A similar answer. "I think my purpose is, well, you know, I don't really know."

Other individuals who were asked the same question said, "My purpose is to have fun. My purpose is to be happy. My purpose is to make a lot of money. My purpose is..."

And you can fill in the blank.

Dear friend, God has given to us the purpose in life. Our reason for existence, the reason why he has granted to us even the days that we have experienced thus far as we look into 2007 God has given to us the purpose of our life. And he uses the analogy of a race, of a runner in a race. And you and I are like runners in a race and this isn't a sprint. This is long distance. It might be like cross country or it might be a marathon, but it is long distance and that we will not be successful by accident.

I invite you to take your Bibles and turn to Philippians chapter three as we look at the purpose that God has for you as an individual, why he has granted to you the opportunities in the year ahead.

Philippians chapter three. Note Paul says in this section is that living on purpose is really it means intentionally running our race, that running this race that God has granted to us, we need to do it by way of intention. It is not by accident. And as we look at this particular passage we will notice two things. First of all we need to make sure that we

run the right race. And, secondly, we need to make sure that we run with the right strategy. Both of those are important to successfully win a race.

So, first of all, let's see what Paul has to say about running the right race.

First of all, Paul says when we run the right race, we need to make sure we are on the right course and we need to make sure we finish.

When I was in high school, I mentioned this before, we were coerced, forced to be part of the cross country team. If you wanted to play basketball, you had to run cross country. Now the coach said that the reason for that was because he thought it was helpful for us to get in shape. And I really think the reason was that if they didn't do they wouldn't have had a cross country team.

And there were very few things that we learned as we ran across the rolling hills of Kansas and ran through some of the thickets and some of the woods that were out there. There would be the course. It would be marked. There were certain markings on the trees and across the rolling hills of what the right course was. And the fact is if you didn't run the right course you were disqualified. If you got off the course, if you intentionally took a corner too short or if you missed it by accident, if you didn't run the right course, you were disqualified.

Secondly, we also learned that you needed to finish. You needed to cross other finish line. You needed to cross the right finish line.

So Paul in this section tells us that we need to make sure that we are running the right course. Paul says this in verse 10, that his course, the course that God has for him and for you and for me is this.

“That I may know Him...”<sup>1</sup>

That I may know Jesus Christ.

“...and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”<sup>2</sup>

When you go on to verse 12 Paul says it is not that I have arrived in the middle of verse 12:

“..but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 3:10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Philippians 3:12.

That the purpose, that our course in life is not to develop a successful company. That may be a leg of the race. It is not to turn out a nice family. That might be part of the race. It might... it isn't the fact to make sure that when we retire we have significant funds to have a nice portfolio. That might be part of the race, but that is not the overarching goal and purpose of our life or purpose of our race. Our race is to know Jesus Christ, to grow in our knowledge of who Jesus Christ is.

That is why Jesus came down into our world, why he died on the cross, why he offers to you and to me eternal life it is so that we might know him. And that is what Paul says in verse 10, that I may know the power of his resurrection.

Now we like that part of it, don't we? We like to see God at work. We like to see great things that have happened. We like to see answers to prayer. Those are good things, but what is the next phrase?

“And the fellowship of his suffering.”<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes in life God allows suffering in our lives so that he might draw us closer to himself. Our race has good days and our race has days that we would say they are tough.

You know, it is nice to go out and run outside when it is 70 degrees in January. But when it is icy and cold and dark it is not much fun running, is it? And yet often times that is part of our race, too. And so Paul says we need to make sure that we are on the right course. It isn't a course of amassing great amounts of stuff or just having fun in the moment. Our course is the purpose to know Jesus Christ and that knowledge there isn't a matter of merely intellectual ideas as if we could say, “Well, you know, there is some things I know about Christ. I know he is the second person of the godhead. I know that he is sinless. I know that he died on the cross. I know that he rose again. I know that he lived here on earth 2000 years ago.”

It is not merely just being able to list off a number of intellectual things. It is developing in our relationship a personal relationship with Christ that I know him better in 2007 than I did in 2006. It is a process. And that knowledge of who Christ is becomes the focal point and becomes our purpose in life. That is why we were created. That is why you were created to have a personal relationship with the God of the universe.

So we need to make sure that we are running the right course. We need to make sure also that we complete the race. And Paul refers to that in verse 14.

“ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”<sup>5</sup>

So that I might finish the race, that I might cross the finish line.

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<sup>4</sup> Philippians 3:10.

<sup>5</sup> Philippians 3:14.

So we need to run the right race. The goal of your race is to know Jesus Christ more fully.

You say, “Well, what is the strategy? I mean, if you run a race, you need to have a strategy. You need to understand how you plan to win this race. And that is important.”

And Paul says there are two aspects or two elements to the strategy. First of all, there is a negative and secondly there is a positive. Well, what is the negative?

Paul says this. The thing we need to let go of the past. If some of you probably are runners. You enjoy it. We didn't, but you might. On chasing of Paul that is a little different story. But there needs to be a strategy. And you realize that if you watch a runner that they don't run looking back over their shoulder. They may take a quick look to see where somebody is, but they don't spend a great deal of time focusing on the past, do they? If they do, they are going to trip and fall.

Folks, in our lives we need to let go of the past. There may be things in the past. There may be successes. There may be good things. There may be great achievements. Maybe you finished high school at top of the list in your class and you received some athletic honors in high school. We can't keep thinking about those. There is life in front of us.

I understand that Bruce Springsteen wrote a song entitled *Glory Days*. And basically it is talking about what life was like back in high school, the good old glory days and he talks about how growing older and they sit around telling boring stories of the glory days.

I remember when. I remember when.

And there are people who live in the past. You know, I had the privilege of leading someone to Christ five years ago. I really developed my relationship and my walk with Christ 10 years ago. You know, I spent time reading and I really felt I grew.

We can't stay back there. You cannot live with the successes of the past. You may have grown in your relationship with Christ in 2006 and that is great. We have got a year in front of us.

So we cannot hang on to the successes of the past. Paul says that in verses seven and eight.

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Philippians 3:7-8.

You look at the life of the apostle Paul. It wasn't because he was washed up that he decided to follow Jesus Christ. He was at the pinnacle of success. He had gone to the right school. You remember he had sat at the feet of Gamaliel like Harvard or Princeton or Oxford. You know, he had the degree. He had the diploma from the right school. He was very prestigious. He had risen to a significant element of success in his day. And when Christ called him he said, "I was willing to leave all of that and follow Jesus because that is the main call. That is the main race."

If Paul would have chased all of those old things, he would have missed finishing and completing his race. He would have run in the wrong race and been disqualified.

So we need to leave behind the successes of the past. We need to understand that life is a journey, this relationship with Christ is a journey. We are not going to achieve it down here. Paul himself said, "I haven't arrived yet. I am still running."

There was a second thing we need to let go of and that is failures and negative events of the past. Let go of the failures of the past. Maybe personal failures. And as you look at 06 you see some things and say, "Man, I really messed up. I really got tripped up. That really side lined me."

Well, tell you what. Confess it before Christ and start on in 07. Don't keep living in the past even with the failures.

Any of you play sports understand that it is important to forget about the mistakes of the past quarter or the past shot and continue playing on into the future. One of the things as we were involved in coaching in tennis sometimes you could watch one of the players made a mistake and maybe didn't hit the right shot, made the wrong choice. And they continue to make wrong choices, because they are still living in the past instead of forgetting it.

You have heard coaches, "Hey, shake it off."

Right?

Friends, shake off the past. God will forgive you and start on the future. Don't get stuck in the failures of the past.

Sometimes individuals get stuck in the failures of past individuals that they have come across. I have heard 30 year olds and 40 year olds say something like, "Well, you know, I really haven't been able to really walk with Christ because my parents didn't raise me right. They didn't help me right. My dad didn't treat me right. My mother didn't treat me right. They didn't help and they are stuck in the past because of what they feel is a failure on the part of someone."

Do you remember the story of Joseph, Old Testament? Joseph as a young man had some brothers and Joseph had been... God had revealed to him that he was going to have a

place of prominence and in a government, didn't tell him which one. And Joseph began sharing that with his brothers. And his brothers, who were jealous, said, "Let's kill him."

Not exactly a loving family. It is somewhat dysfunctional, wouldn't you think? Let's kill him. And that was their plan until there came along a band and they say, "Hey, let's not kill him. There is no money in that. Let's sell him. Let's sell him to somebody else and we can make some money and we will tell dad that an animal killed our brother and we will have covered ourselves and, plus, we are a little richer and we will be in good stead." And that is what happened.

And they sold Joseph to a band that was heading down to Egypt. They got down to Egypt and Joseph began. He didn't complain about the past. He didn't get stuck in the past. He didn't deserve it, yet he said, "I am going to follow God. I am going to do what God has called me to do."

And he rose to a place of... and a position and power in Potiphar's household and he was in charge of everything that Potiphar had. And you remember Mrs. Potiphar made some false accusations about Joseph trying to come on to her and as a result of that Joseph is thrown in prison.

Folks, you don't get any lower than a slave in prison in a foreign country. That is the bottom of the pit. And Joseph could have sat there and licked his wounds and said, "This is not really where I belong. I didn't deserve this. I don't... God, you know, you failed me in all this."

Do you recall what happened? He said, "Hey, God has got me here for a reason. There are some things that God can teach me through the failures not only of my life, but of maybe family and friend around me."

He was released from prison. He ended up being second in command in all of Egypt. There is a famine that covers the Palestine area. And there is food that has been stored in Egypt because God had revealed that to Joseph and he is there and he watches as his brothers come before him.

And Joseph was in disguise. He looked like an Egyptian and the brothers didn't even think he was still alive. So they had no idea that they were standing before their brother. And Joseph saw them and he said, "Ah, I am going to run a test." Going to see what is in their hearts, see if they have learned anything.

And he ran a test to determine whether or not their emotions had changed, if they had learned something. They passed the test. And Joseph then on one day decided to reveal himself to his brothers who he was and when he did and his brothers found out it was Joseph to whom they were giving account, they were terrified because Joseph had the power of life and death.

He could have said, "Kill those guys. They mistreated me."

Now some of you may want that power over one of your siblings, but that really doesn't work. And you remember what happened as those brothers were petrified and they looked at Joseph and they begged for mercy and Joseph said to them, "You meant it for evil." What is the next phrase? "God meant it for good."

Dear friends, don't get stuck in the disappointments and failures of the past whether it is your failure or somebody else's failure. Run your race that God has set before you.

So the first aspect of the strategy is let go of the past. There is a second aspect of the strategy which is positive. Stay focused on the finish. Stay focused on the finish. And Paul refers to that when he says, "I am grabbing a hold of that for which I was grabbed a hold of. I am looking to the finish line."

My friend, that finish line is when you and I end our earthly existence, when we finish that life. That is that line. And we need to determine. Have we run a good race before God?

Stay focused on the finish line.

In order to stay focused it takes discipline and it takes determining what your priorities are.

Notice what Paul said. He said in verse 13:

"This one thing I do."<sup>7</sup>

Not these 40 things I dabble at. Here is my focus and here are my priorities.

Jesus said to the rich young ruler who appeared to have everything, had wealth, had money, had power, prestige. And Jesus said to him, "This one thing you lack."

Friends, it takes discipline in our lives to understand what the priorities are of eternity.

I read a story of some hunters, a group of men who decided to go hunting and they went out and rented a lodge and they were there in a day and the next day they got up early to go out hunting. And they decided they needed to pair off by, obviously by twos. That is surprising, isn't it? Pair off by twos. And they decided to go out and they went out and everybody came back in that night and a little bit later on there was one individual who come struggling back in and he is dragging an eight point buck that was very, very heavy. And one of the other members said, "Hey, where is Harry? He was with you."

He went alone and he said, the guy responded, he said, "Well, Harry got sick. He is a couple of miles back."

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<sup>7</sup> Philippians 3:13.



And they looked at him and said, “Well, why did you do that? How could you make that decision?”

And he said, “Well, you know, it was really, really very tough to make a decision like that.” He said, “But I figured nobody is going to steal Harry.”

He got his priorities wrong. Next some of you hunters may think he got it right. But the priorities were wrong.

Friends, in our lives we need to make sure that our priorities are right, that our focus is on our race, that race of getting to know Jesus Christ. That is the purpose that God has granted to us.

The opportunity of 2007 is to grow in our knowledge of who Jesus is. And that is reflected out then in our home. It is reflected out in our place of employment. It is reflected out in our school, in our families.

The tragedy is to run a race but be on the wrong course. There are some individuals who are running good races. They are doing well with their companies. Maybe it is private individual company. They are doing very well there or maybe the group that they manage. Or maybe the company that they manage and sales are going up and they are doing very well, but when you come to the end of life if that is all it is, my friend, you have run the wrong race, because it is all left behind.

Or we would say, “Well, you know, I am running a good race. I am accumulating a portfolio. One of these days I am going to be able to retire and I will be able to do some things that I have been wanting to do.” And you do well with your retirement and your investments and that is all it is fine and good, but you have run the wrong race when you come to the end if that is all it is.

Well, I am going to have a good time here on the earth. I am going to just live for the moment and enjoy stuff and you may. That is the wrong race.

I am going to raise my family, raise a nice family. And so you raise your family and inculcate into them and you work with them and... but if it is devoid of a knowledge of Jesus Christ, you are in the wrong course.

Those things are good, but they need to be under the umbrella of the purpose of knowing and growing in our knowledge of Christ. Your purpose on planet earth is to grow in your knowledge of Christ.

Maybe you are here this morning and this the first time you have heard about what your purpose is. You say, “Ok, so how do I get in the race? What do I need to do?”

Friend, you need to do what all of us have come to understand that we are sinners and we are in need of a Savior and that Jesus Christ came into our world and he died on the cross

to deal with your sin and mine so that we might have stamped “paid in full” on our debt before God. That is the race. We get in because of what Jesus has done.

For some of you maybe you started down that race, but you got distracted. The stuff of this world has kind of tripped you up. There are some things that have hindered your run. Let me encourage you. Get back in the race. 2007 is in front of you. There is a God who desires to forgive you and to help you back in your race.

Your friends, this race isn’t something we do on our own. We run it together. Though each of us must cross the finish line.

I would encourage you that as you think about this race you understand that it is being a full time Christian. It isn’t just a Sunday morning thing. It isn’t just a Wednesday night thing or an occasional thing. It is being a full time Christian and getting and growing in our knowledge of Christ.

So you say, “How do you do that?”

Let me give you a couple of things. First of all the strategy for doing that. Number one, if you don't spend consistent time with God, I would encourage you to do that. Twenty minutes a day. Take 10 minutes and pick up a passage, a paragraph from Scripture. Ten minutes and read through it and kind of reflect on it. Say, “God, what do you want to teach me from this? How can I grow in my knowledge of who Jesus is and how I can serve?”

And then take 10 minutes as you meditate on it to begin to prayerfully think it through in your own life and pray for some other individuals, just 20 minutes a day.

Maybe some of you do longer. That is great.

Dear friends, the amount of time that you invest in getting to know someone is important, isn't it? But make it a priority, maybe first thing in the morning because there is a lot of stuff that can come in and we can set out with good desires, but it doesn't happen. So start with time with God consistently.

Secondly, look for opportunities to serve him at your work, at your school, in your family, among your friends and your church. Let me challenge you to do this. Think through three individuals that you know who don't know Jesus and begin praying that they might come to know him this year, three individuals.

Some of you, there are individuals in this church who have come to know Jesus Christ in 2006 because some individual began to pray consistently for them.

Some of them shared by way of baptism a few weeks ago. Three individuals that God would lead you to pray for to share Christ with.

Living on purpose. What is a purpose to grow in our knowledge and our personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you that you desire to know us. We are not here by accident. We are not here by chance. We are not just a matter of random atoms that somehow link together to produce some sort of life. We were designed with a purpose and that is to know you and to have a relationship with you, not merely even a Sunday morning kind of thing, but a daily experience in that it is our purpose in life as Paul said this one thing I do is getting to know and growing in Jesus Christ, developing my relationship with him and how it is lived out at work and at school and at home and in recreation. And, Father, as we look at 2007, great opportunities, Lord, they are there. We look forward to feeling and experiencing the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Father, we understand, too, that there is going to be the fellowship of the suffering. Those are not accidents. Those are not random events. Those are opportunities that you have granted to us to grow in our knowledge in a different dimension of who Jesus is. And, Father, I pray that each one here that when they reflect back in a year on the events and affairs of 2007, Lord, we see it was a great year in growing to know Jesus better. Father, I pray for us as a church as we look forward to some great opportunities in front of us, missions trip, Father, ministry in our own community here in Hathaway, the lives of people. Lord, we pray that we might be about those things that are absolutely important, because eternity is real and it lasts forever. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*