

Focused Living
November 10, 2013

Rick Warren's best selling book, titled, The Purpose Driven Life, starts off with this sentence. **"It's not about you."** Some of you, who read that book, will remember that all your life. His point is that my life is not about me. Let me finish that first paragraph. ***"The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by His purpose and for his purpose."*** (page 17)

That flies directly in the face of our American culture. The main message of our culture for the last 50 years has been, "It's all about you." We have been encouraged in thousands of different ways to have it our way. Not only can we get dessert, but we should have it all the time. You deserve it.

There is a conflict between people and the God who created them. This has always been so. Man wants to do his own thing. Man resists God's will. Man resists God's will in all things. We see this in current conflicts over marriage, drug use, taxes, government authority, entertainment, regulation of business, and more. There is a conflict between the will of man and the will of God.

We as Christians are not immune to this. You can see how the spirit of American culture has influenced us in some of the phrases that have become part of the church in America. We have phrases such as these: church shopping, church hopping, seeker focused, and worship wars. All of these carry some aspect of self-focused living. These phrases didn't come about because people were focused on God's will.

You can see this conflict between man's will and God's will throughout the Bible. We see it in the history of the Israelites. Just as Jacob wrestled with a messenger of God, so the nation wrestled with God's purposes. King Saul wanted his son, Jonathan, to follow him as king. But God had chosen David to be the next king. Saul tried his best to kill David and prevent him from being the king after Saul.

Jesus too, was tempted to serve Himself rather than God's purposes. We see an example of this in Luke's biography of Jesus. This takes place after His baptism, but before the start of His public preaching tour.

Luke 4:1-4 (NIV) Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"

Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit. The phrase "filled with the Spirit" means "fully yielded to the Spirit". (**"filled with the Spirit" = "fully yielded to the Spirit"**) When it says Jesus was filled with the Spirit, it means that Jesus was fully yielded to the Spirit of God. The Spirit directed Jesus in living the will of God. The Spirit led Jesus out into the

desert. This is probably the Judean dessert, south of Jericho. It was also called the Judean wilderness. It was a most inhospitable place. It was dry, hot, dirty, not much grows there.

Jesus was perfect. He lived every moment fully aware of God, fully obedient to God, fully praising God, fully thankful to God. He lived full of the Spirit, fully yielded to the Spirit.

We too are encouraged to be full of the Holy Spirit. Paul, in his letter to the church at Ephesus, writes:

Ephesians 5:18 (NIV) ... be filled with the Spirit.

A literal translation would read, "be being filled with the Spirit". It is something we need to continue to do. Be being filled over and over again. The reason it doesn't last is that, as vessels of the Holy Spirit, we leak. We want to be focused on God, but we find it hard to stay that way. We have an internal struggle. Part of us just wants want we want when we want it, no matter what God's will is. Part of us is focused on self, not God. We are always battling this pressure to serve self. And we often lose the battle. That is why we sin so much.

As I said, the reason we need to be filled over and over with the Spirit is that we leak. When we realize we have sinned, being focused on self, we stop, confess our sin, repent, and offer ourselves to be filled once more. We have to be filled over and over.

So Jesus was in the desert for forty days and ate nothing. Yet look at the miracle. He did not die. We don't know whether He felt hunger the whole time or if part of the miracle was that He did not feel hungry during the forty days. But at the end, He felt hungry.

Our bodies are made to function on the fuel of food. But God can override this. God can override any aspect of human need. For forty days Jesus has been living at the center of a miracle. He ate nothing for forty days, but did not die. God preserved His body.

So what went on for those forty days? This was a period of preparation and testing. Jesus was preparing for His public ministry. He was looking for direction, wisdom, and courage to face the coming challenges.

It was also a time of testing. It was a test of Jesus' will, of His commitment, of His resolve to accept His mission, including the cross. He may have had moments of doubts and fears. He had to deal with those and determine to accept God's will for His life.

And any time we are being tested, Satan uses that opportunity to tempt us. So he was here too, tempting Jesus to sin. I think the devil was tempting Jesus to forget the whole thing and go back to the carpenter shop.

At the end of the forty days, He was very hungry. And in such a state anyone, including Jesus, has a harder time resisting temptation. Isn't that true? When I am tired, hungry, stressed, or frustrated, I have a harder time staying focused on God and God's will. I think more about me than about God. I just want relief. Don't you find that true of you?

So Satan comes and says to Jesus, "Hey, I know how hungry you are. If you are the Son of God"... Note the question in that. Note the challenge, the dare, in that. "If you are the Son of God, prove it. If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

What was the issue here? What made this a temptation to sin? It wasn't an obedience issue. As far as we know there was no command from God not to eat yet, or not to turn the stones into bread. There is no prohibition in the Law of Moses against turning stones into bread. Bread was clean to eat. We see nothing in the context that implies it would be disobedient of Jesus to turn the stones into bread.

Nor was it a trust issue. God had proved He could sustain life without food, whether Jesus felt hungry or not. Surely, Jesus had enough faith to believe He would not starve, even if He suffered some hunger pangs for awhile. I don't think He was tempted to mistrust God.

So what is the issue here? The issue is one of stewardship. It is a stewardship issue. Jesus is a steward of the power of God. Jesus had been entrusted with power from on high. It wasn't His power. It was God's power. And Jesus was supposed to use it for God's purposes. Nowhere do we get a hint that the purpose of the power was to meet any other of His human needs.

Instead, God gave this power for the work of the Kingdom of God. It was for proclaiming the good news that the Kingdom of God had arrived. It was for healing people and drawing them deeper toward God. It was for calling people to repent of their sins. It was for freeing people from demons. It was for convincing His disciples of who He was. It wasn't for turning stones into bread.

It was a stewardship issue. And we have the same issue. What has God entrusted to you that you should be using for His Kingdom?

Every Christian has been given one or more spiritual gifts. These are to be used for ministry in the church. The Holy Spirit empowers this ministry to build up the church.

1 Corinthians 12:7 (NIV) Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Who is to benefit from these gifts? The church is to benefit. Your spiritual gift is not for you. It is for us. And you should be using your gift in the life of the church.

Romans 12:6-8 (NIV) We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Are you using your spiritual gift to build up the church? This month is the time of the year when the Nominating Committee is working to fill leadership and service positions

in the church for the coming year. If you have not filled out a survey form, please take a minute this morning and fill it out and leave it with me or Vivian.

When you are asked to serve, take a few days or a week to pray about it. We try to use wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in asking you. You too need to seek the leading of the Holy Spirit about saying yes or no. Don't just say no because you don't want to do something. Don't just say yes because you are willing to work. We need the right people in the right positions.

God equips and empowers His people for the work of the church. Do not take this lightly. This was the temptation of Jesus. He was tempted to let His need for food control His focus. This is an issue you and I face every moment of every day. This is the lesson God wants us to see this morning.

Don't make your needs the focus of your life.

You know about the difference between needs and wants. You know that your wants are often self-focused. You know it is a sin to focus your life on your wants. Not all your wants are sinful things. But any of your wants can lead you into sin. Any hobby can take over your life. Any pursuit, no matter how legal, can be consuming. You can neglect your family, and your Savior, pursuing your wants.

The same can be said of pursuing your needs. It is a sin to focus your life on your needs. Just as the pursuit of your wants can lead you into sin, so can pursuit of your needs lead you into sin.

Trust God to meet your needs. God can meet any of your needs. He can do so through the normal way, or He can do so with a miracle. Trust Him to meet your needs. Don't let your needs be the focus of your life. Jesus must be the focus of your life.

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God's will for everyone is to believe the good news of Jesus. The good news starts with the bad news that we are all sinners before God. We have been living in conflict with God, focused on self-will instead of God's will. This is sin. And what sin earns us is a guilty verdict and a sentence of hell.

But God loves you and has sent you a rescuer, a savior. Jesus came to earth to live a perfect life and then die in our place, for our sin. God accepted Jesus death on our behalf and proved it by raising Him from the dead.

God's promise is that if you will believe these spiritual truths, trust in Jesus as your Savior, and turn your life over to Him, God will forgive your sins and you will inherit eternal life with Him.

Do so this morning as we go to Jesus in prayer.