

To Serve God's Purposes – part 1

Joining God's Team – part 9

March 3, 2024

Life vision statement: By God's grace, to step forward, as God's man or woman, in my spheres of influence, **to serve His purposes**, for His glory.

God's fundamental purpose is the redemption of lost humanity.

DAY 1: How and why the world fell

1. Listen to secular comics and secularists sneer at the story of Adam and Eve. It is usually dumbed down to something perfectly innocent, eating an apple.

2. And the question left hanging in the air is, "What's so wrong about that? And what's the deal with God's apparent overreaction to eating an apple?"

3. What really happened in the Garden of Eden? Before the fall, before the sin of Adam and Eve:

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. ³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

4. Adam and Eve were created to live in paradise with God. Every conceivable need was met. The sun provided light for living, for growing plants and crops, and warmth during the day. A vast array of varieties of food was provided.

5. Most fundamental of all, God was their center for living and relating. He gave them an abundance of freedom with very few restrictions. As they obeyed Him and His laws, human flourishing occurred. They found their core satisfaction in being in a loving relationship with their Creator. There was no relational drama, no anxiety, no depression, no anger, no abuse, no addiction, etc.

*Genesis 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are **free** to eat from **any** tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must **not** eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."*

6. In spite of all the freedoms, joys, and satisfaction God gave Adam and Eve, they believed Satan's lie that God was not good, and not out for their best. God was holding out on them. Therefore, they needed to take matters into their own hands, make their own rules, do what they wanted with the delusional belief that their decisions would not bring about terrible consequences, as they were warned. They put themselves at the center of their lives and kicked God out of the center of their lives. It was a determined, arrogant rebellion that brought misery to them.

7. What strikes you from today's writing?

DAY 2: The fallen world: We disconnect our self from His centrality in our heart

1. We all live in a fallen world. Human misery, brokenness, heartache, drama, broken relationships, misunderstandings, hurt feelings, anxiety, depression, fear, worry, anger, addiction, abuse, exploitation, and hundreds of other human maladies make up our human existence. We suffer, relationships suffer, others suffer from our human willfulness. What is the root?

Romans 1:21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

2. Our fallen human nature has cut us off from God. We kicked Him out of the center of our lives and have replaced Him with almost anything else. Our thinking about God, life, humanity, and relationships became corrupted, “futile,” and foolish. We foolishly believe that we are better off with ourselves as central in our lives than having God as central in our lives.

3. What strikes you from Paul’s words in Rom. 1:21-23?

Romans 1:24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

²⁶ *Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

²⁸ *Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. ³² Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

4. When we determine to go our own way, to put ourselves at the center of our lives, God allows us to make that choice. “He gave them over...” means He allowed us to do what we were determined to do. He would not restrain our will, nor shelter us from the consequences of our foolish choices.

5. Being centrally disconnected from God also means that His restraining power in our lives has been cut off. We have done the cutting. The result? The human maladies that come with an unrestrained heart, centered around ourselves and our desires!

6. What strikes you from today’s writing?

DAY 3: The delusion of the lie

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

1. Satan comes to Eve creating doubt in her mind about the goodness of God ("Did God really say..." and twisted God's words of freedom and one restriction to the polar opposite meaning ("You must not eat from ANY tree...?")

2. What strikes you about Satan's tactics and lies to Eve?

3. The effects of these lies swayed her away from being a God-centered woman to being a self-centered woman. She, doubted God's goodness, and chose to rebel against the simplest of God's loving commands. She kicked God to the curb in her heart, and placed herself on the throne in her heart.

Genesis 3:2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

4. Eve responds to Satan's delusion. Her thinking is now muddled and confused. She does not accurately remember God's goodness and wise prohibition.

Genesis 3:4 "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

5. Satan goes for the jugular. He calls God a liar without using the word "liar." Satan insinuates, again, that God is holding out on Adam and Eve. "What could be so wrong about knowing good and evil?" He appealed to her pride, her pleasure, and the forbidden. As the beer commercial used to say, she was "going for the gusto."

6. What strikes you about Satan's lies in Gen. 3:4?

Genesis 3:6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

7. She drew every wrong conclusion imaginable, about God, His centrality, His goodness, and her assumed control and the rightness of her desires.

8. These are some of the dynamics of our fallen nature. They are based on lies and delusions that we foolishly adopt, as we saw in Romans 1.

9. What strikes you from today's writing?

DAY 4: Re-gaining real life—the necessity of God

1. Ever since Genesis 3, God has been on a rescue mission to bring us out of

- Darkness and into His light,
- Death to life,
- Bondage to sin and into His freedom,
- Blindness and into sight,
- Prisoners to release,
- The kingdom of Satan into the Kingdom of His Son,
- Shame and guilt and into the joy of being in His family,
- Foolishness and into wisdom

2. In the following verses, underline the concepts that strike you the most about God's rescue mission with us.

Titus 3:3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,

to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,

² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, ³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

Ephesians 2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh ^m and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

John 10:10 "The thief (Satan) comes only to steal, kill and destroy. I came that they might have life, life in its abundance."

3. The different metaphors illustrating the mammoth undertaking of God's rescue operation takes my breath away.

4. It is the central story of life! What strikes you from today's writing?

DAY 5: Refuting Satan's lie; the love of God for people

1. Human beings have backed themselves into a terrible corner and exasperating conundrum.
 - a. We make ourselves the center of our lives instead of God,
 - b. We decide the rules, not God,
 - c. We live for our desires, not God's desires,
 - d. We make ourselves the central actor in the story of our lives, not Jesus Christ,
 - e. We will only do what God wants us to do as long as it is already what we want to do.
 - f. We resist any rule God makes that does not align with our desires, feelings, immediate pleasures, etc.
 - g. And we see all of that, not only as completely justifiable, but as wise.
 - h. Finally, we are morally blind, that any and all of the above statements are not morally devastating to us and others.
 - i. "There are no real consequences to doing what brings me pleasure. I can do what I want without fear of meaningful consequences."
2. What strikes you from this list?

3. What can possibly break the "spell" over us? The bible tells us that only the cross has the power to jolt us out of our "justified self-centeredness" It is the Innocent dying for the guilty that demonstrates both the love of God for people, and the grace of God that would take undeserving rebels like us!

4. Underline what strikes you about God's love and cross.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrated His own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

John 12:32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

John 8:28 So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

5. Nothing else can change our human nature! We cannot reach inside of us to change our essential *nature!* No amount of will power, promises, New Year's resolutions, trying harder, doing good, - nothing can fundamentally change our nature—but the cross, God's love on display.

6. What strikes you from today's writing?