

Purpose

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Matt 11²⁵⁻³⁰ / 1 Cor 9¹⁹⁻²⁷

I wonder how many of you recognise this man? I doubt any of you will. He lived a long time ago for a very short time. In fact in 1904 he graduated from a Chicago high school and at that time as heir to the Borden Dairy estate, he was already a millionaire. For his high school graduation present his parents gave him a trip around the world. As the young man travelled through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, he felt a growing burden for the world's hurting people. Finally, the man who was christened William Whiting Borden made a momentous decision and that decision was to inject purpose into his life. He wrote home and said this to his parents, "I'm going to give my life to prepare for the mission field." At the same time, he wrote two words in the back of his Bible: "No reserves."

Indeed, Borden held nothing back. During his college years at Yale University, he became a pillar in the Christian community. One entry in his personal journal that defined the source of his spiritual strength simply said: "Say no to self and yes to Jesus every time."

During his first semester at Yale, Borden started a small prayer group that would transform campus life. This little group gave birth to a movement that spread across the campus. By the end of his first year, 150 first year students were meeting for weekly Bible study and prayer. By the time Bill Borden was a senior, 1,000 of Yale's 1,300 students were meeting in such groups, fully 77% of the university.

Borden also strategized with his fellow Christians to make sure every student on campus heard the gospel, and he was often seen ministering to the downtrodden in the streets of New Haven. But his real passion was missions. Once he narrowed his missionary call to the Kansu people in China, Borden never wavered.

Upon graduation from Yale, Borden wrote two more words in the back of his Bible: "No retreats." In keeping with that commitment, Borden turned down several high-paying job offers, enrolling in seminary instead. After graduating, he immediately went to Egypt to learn Arabic because of his intent to work with Muslims in China. While in Egypt, he contracted spinal meningitis. Within a month, 25-year-old William Borden was dead.

Prior to his death, Borden had written two more words in his Bible. Underneath the words "No reserves" and "No retreats," he had written: "No regrets."

No reverses, No retreats, No regrets... three things which define someone with purpose in their life. Three things which define the meaning of purpose and three things which are required for any kind of real success. What is purpose?

Well the dictionary defines it as "The reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists:" but a further definition and one which takes human motivation into account is the one I prefer... "a person's sense of resolve or determination" and then in verb form we have "to have as one's intention or objective."

So purpose provides the reason for doing something and the determination to do it. And it applies as much to our faith as to anything else in life.

Paul says in our reading today that ²⁶**Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. ²⁷No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.**’ In other words he applies purpose to his faith so that he might achieve results worthy of the one he worships.

We may think of purpose very much as something like a major dam producing hydroelectric power. For years we in New Zealand have used our plentiful water resource to produce electricity and the principle behind this is quite simple really. Water is heavy and powerful and very useful for driving turbines which produce power **if you can channel the water to those turbines.** But water will simply flow where it is driven by its own weight and the lie of the land upon which it falls. To channel that water we must deliberately guide the water into great reservoirs where it can be piped into turbines. A dam and its attendant walls and structures does precisely this and it does this because there is a purpose behind the structures – to create electricity. Purpose has created something useful from the water. Purpose has been behind creating the dam walls **so that** something may be done with it. And the same is true of us.

You and I are born with all sorts of potential – potential to be the people of God and to do the work God requires of us. In order, however, to reach that potential purpose must be applied to our lives. Just like an athlete we must go into training to attain the Crown and that means we cannot simply expect our faith to tag along with the rest of our life and remain somewhat intact while

we apply ourselves to our careers or our hobbies or our desires.
Faith requires application, it requires a purposeful plan of action.
How are we going to move forward with God this Year? How are we going to tap that incredible potential to produce good things in the kingdom of heaven this year? Paul had a plan, have we?

Now one of the objections to this approach to faith that I hear quite often is that this all sounds incredibly demanding and energy sapping and actually I come to church to be built up and encouraged and resourced – not to have to **'perform'** again. And to be fair there is something in this in that Jesus makes it clear in our passage from Matthew today that we may rely on Him to be our strength and our coach and to find rest. This is a clear corrective to an activist view of the Christian life.

However, read correctly even this passage requires a commitment on our behalf and that commitment is to come to Jesus and to trust Him with our lives and to place all that we are into His arms and **to take His yoke** – that is, to take up the work He gives us. How many of us do this and then rescind the agreement when we're not happy about the terms of the rest? Yes, Jesus does bring us into a rest which is essentially the peace of God, a peace which comes from becoming who we were always intended to be – children of God. But it is no coincidence that the call to enter into rest with Jesus is followed immediately by a call to take up His work, his yoke.

So this year God calls us to really think about how we are going to move our faith forward, how we are going to **make progress** in our faith and how we are going to **become productive**. William Borden died when he was 25 years old and before he's attained the career missionary position he'd been working towards since making the declaration to his parents that he want to serve the poor with the

Gospel. But before he died he influenced a huge number of people and literally changed the course of 1000's of lives because he became purposeful about his faith. **No reverses, No retreats, No regrets.**

I want to begin answering this question by looking at three things which will tend to defeat purpose when it comes to faith. Sometimes it's better to look at what prevents us doing something first.

The first thing is the notion or the thought that this is '**about me.**' That is, that this is some kind of 'self-help' type scheme except dressed up in Christian jargon with a religious cloak. When God takes us into Himself He will always direct us down rather than up. [repeat]

When we inject purpose into our Christian walk God will always lead us into **service** and the one thing about service is that it is the end of self...

When we serve we must always put self second. Indeed I would go so far as to say that service is the cure for self in all its lesser forms. There is a form of purposefulness which is all about serving self. We become purposeful to achieve what **we** want so that **we** will shine and so that **we** will be rewarded. What I've discovered over the years is that people may come to Christ with that approach but the service he leads them into kills that attitude dead and it does so because Christian service is real service in that it has no pretensions towards power or control. As Mother Theresa put it...

“Prayer in action is love, and love in action is service. Try to give unconditionally whatever a person needs in the moment. The point is to do something, however small,

and show you care through your actions by giving your time ... We are all God's children so it is important to share His gifts. Do not worry about why problems exist in the world – just respond to people's needs ... We feel what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean, but that ocean would be less without that drop."

Those who serve for self's sake want people to notice the ocean filling up and to notice that it is doing so because they served. It is a self-killer to realise that will never happen and that even a lifetime's service will likely be lost in the ocean that is human need. **If we want to be purposeful we must begin by being prepared to put self aside.**

The second great negative which must be dealt with is the frightening size of the need which surrounds us. This is what I call the Peter principle. Purpose in Christ requires the vision of Christ for when we take our eyes off Christ the only thing left to our eyes is the size of the waves. This is what happened to Peter. He took his eyes off Christ and he placed them firmly on the problem. How many great mission endeavours have begun in the face of overwhelming odds? Virtually all of them. The conversion of the Roman Empire – you foolish Christians. Whoever told you this could be achieved. We'll martyr you all before the year's out. Well it took about 300 years but Rome has been largely Christian ever since. The conversion of Ireland. Even Rome avoided it because of the ferocity of its tribes but one man – Patrick, was convinced it could be done and in his lifetime it was largely achieved. The conversion of Africa? White men couldn't survive there such were the terrors of the jungle and the difficulties of its geography but

one man, David Livingstone decided it could be done and before his life was over he had opened up virtually the whole of north Africa to missionary endeavour. As he himself said *'I am prepared to go anywhere, provided it be forward.'*

And we could go on. The conversion of China, the tackling of Leprosy in India by that wonderful surgeon Paul Brand which led not only to a completely new approach to leprosy but also to many developments in the field of surgery in general.

The point is this. If we look at the problem rather than the call we will forego purpose – we will never get started. Don't look at the size of the problem. No reverses, No retreats, No regrets!

Finally we will never be able to follow through with our purpose if we despise the day of small beginnings. Zechariah 4¹⁰ says this **'¹⁰ Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand.'**

Compared to the mammoth task of rebuilding the Temple against significant local opposition the foundation stones seemed pathetic to Zechariah but God warns him not to despise it – not to become discouraged by this 'small beginning' but to **'stay the course.'**

Likewise purposeful action can look incredibly insignificant to start with and we can easily become discouraged by this impression. In the end what is often behind this is the desire again for people to see the ocean filling at our hands – to be considered significant and effective. It may be that this will happen but we don't apply purpose to our faith out of such a hope. Rather we apply purpose for the sake of Christ and His witness in our lives.

An athlete runs perhaps hundreds of non-race miles so that in the race that counts they might succeed in the one race that counts – the race that has a prize.

We are preparing for the one race that counts – the race towards Christ. Are we prepared then to run the miles without glory so that eternal glory may be ours? Are we prepared to run the anonymous miles to achieve the miles that will count in the end? That's the question every athlete must face. Perhaps you don't recognise this very famous runner – his name is...? Yes and here's the race that made history and that marked New Zealand out as a land of runners...

[Lovelock video]

Jack Lovelock ran up Lovelock Avenue every day for several years whilst no one was watching. He perhaps ran up there more than once a day. He spent hours of unwatched, un-noticed time running up that street in order to run the one race that counted **and to win!** Paul wants us, likewise to win the race that counts this year –the race to glorify Jesus through a life surrendered to Him. Will you join me in asking Jesus to help us be purposeful in this race? Will you give your life purposefully to Christ today?