

What Am I Doing Here?

1st Kings 19:9-18; Luke 17:7-10; 2nd Cor 5:9-19



Why am I here? What is the point of life? Is there a reason for life at all? We have strong instincts for survival, yet we know that death is a natural part of life. Why should we care so much about surviving? Isn't there more to life than surviving or even enjoying the ride? What purpose is there in living that gives meaning to life as a whole?

Elijah was not the first of the prophets to feel isolated and depressed. Neither was he the last. He had served *Yahweh* in ways that were powerful demonstrations of God's singularity before the nation. He had expected that the demonstration of God's power over Baal would effect worthwhile change among the people and power structures of Israel. When this did not happen, he was ready to lie down and die. Elijah left for the mountain where God had spoken to Moses. He was distressed, for there was no more point in living. All he had done had amounted to nothing. It was pointless. He was throwing in the towel. In the midst of his despair, God said, "Elijah, I am not through with you. You can't see the whole picture. You are still my servant, and there is work to be done. Oh, and by the way, you are not the only one left. I have seven thousand servants you don't know."

Elijah was caught up in his own fears and doubts. One of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament, he had lost his sense of purpose and perspective. He lay down hoping to die before Jezebel had the opportunity to kill him. He needed a renewed focus on God's design. He needed to get his eyes off himself and his personal fears. He needed reminding that his major purpose was to serve God—nothing more, nothing less. After the fashion of Jesus' words in Luke 17, Elijah arose and got back on task. He set himself aside and got back to fulfilling God's call on his life. He may not have understood what God was doing, but it was in serving God that life had meaning and he had a reason to carry on.

Paul's words crystallize for us Elijah's reason for being. "We make it our goal to please Him." It was the fact that God still had a use for Elijah that enabled Elijah to keep going. Being restored to a sense of purpose enabled Elijah to get through the despondence and despair that had settled upon him. Elijah's life centered upon serving God. Without the opportunity to serve, there was no point to living.

"We make it our goal to please Him." Our purpose in life is to serve God, such that we might bring pleasure to the Christ we call Lord. Serving Christ Jesus in faithfulness is Paul's central purpose. His desire is to please the Master, presenting as his gift a life devoted to service. That is the essence of Paul's perspective on purpose.

Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that we shall all appear before God to present an account of our lives. He wanted something worthy of presenting to God. He wanted his life to count for more than a stream of actions designed to protect and promote his own comfort.

Paul's sense of purpose in serving Christ flowed from the compelling nature of Christ's love. The love he had experienced in Christ enabled him to serve and love others. Experiencing love that gave its own life on his behalf, Paul no longer wanted to live for himself. He had seen in Christ Jesus a better way to live. He had experienced a higher purpose for living.

Paul indicates that these words of purpose and meaning are not for him alone. He found meaning and purpose in serving Christ Jesus out of gratitude for God's love, mercy, and grace. Yet he says this is sufficient and compelling purpose for every believer. The purpose of Christ's death on our behalf was to enable each and every one of us to live no longer for ourselves, but for the One who died for us. To continue living for myself is to discard any meaning and purpose in the death of Christ Jesus.

Failure to grasp this aspect of Paul's gospel is to discard the integrity of Paul's writings. "For me to live is Christ."¹ "I am crucified with Christ."² "Put to death whatever in you is earthly."³ "Put on, then the Lord Jesus Christ."⁴ "Present yourself as a living sacrifice."⁵ "You are not your own—you were bought with a price."⁶ "I press on to the goal of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus."⁷ Paul's words are clear that his purpose is to allow Christ to live in and through him to the exclusion of all else. Paul's words are clear. His actions are clear as well.

Christ's love compelled Paul to give his own life as a vehicle of God's love. To be found in Christ Jesus and identified with Christ was the goal that drove Paul's existence. Paul claimed this not to be his purpose alone, but sufficient purpose for our lives as well.

It boggles my mind why God would do according to Paul's words, but that is the message of the gospel of Christ Jesus. There is just no way around it. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself... and has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation." I am not worthy to assume such an important mission. Paul was not worthy of this mission task. We are not worthy or sufficient to take up this mission and purpose. None of that seems to matter. The task is laid upon us. There is no escaping the charge.

Elijah was in despair because he thought he had lost all purpose in life. He had lived a life of meaning. He had lived to make a difference. When he felt that quality of purpose had been taken away, he had no more reason to live. Serving God in faithfulness was so fulfilling and rewarding that no other purpose could possibly measure up. Paul lived with that same sense of purpose and meaning. Christ had entrusted him with such meaning and purpose that there was nothing else for which to live.

What am I doing here? Like Paul and Elijah, I was created with a purpose. I was formed to be useful in God's design. Oh, I could choose to live my life according to some other selfish design. God gave me the option to live for myself despite the plan and purpose of His design. Having experienced the joy of serving God and seeing my life count for eternity, there is just nothing else worth my while.

What am I doing here? What are we doing here? God has a purpose for our lives. God planned for more than our existence and survival. We were created to count for something. Our lives were designed to make a difference. Shall we accept God's purpose and plan above our selfish designs? What am I doing here? We were created with a purpose. To pass it up is to throw our lives away.

—*Christopher B. Harbin*

¹ Philippians 1:21.

² Galatians 2:20.

³ Colossians 3:5.

⁴ Romans 13:14.

⁵ Romans 12:1.

⁶ 1st Corinthians 6:20; 7:23.

⁷ Philippians 3:12-14.