

Don't Die Before Your Time

As we enter spring, the time of year when all of God's creation is bringing forth new life, I take pause and ponder: What if one of God's creations said, "No! I refuse to bring forth new life—I'd rather just die?" You might think that's just silly.

If a plant was perfectly capable of producing a branch and from that branch a bud and from that bud a flower and from the flower perhaps some fruit, why would it refuse?

Why, indeed?

Maybe, it's been a hard winter and the struggle to survive has just about nipped it in the bud—excuse the pun. There's another chance that a new flower has been planted next to it and the feeling of inferiority is overwhelming. Maybe it doesn't like the competition.

Could it be the thought of growing in the same garden again and again has become boring? Of course not. A plant will continue to grow and produce fruit as long as its lifeblood is maintained and it is provided with the proper nutrients to perpetuate life. It really doesn't have a choice.

Humans, on the other hand, are quite a different story.

Today's garden is full of God's children who refuse to live. That choice is what separates us from the other creatures on the planet. Adam and Eve's choice is why we suffer as we till the ground or give birth to our children. Cain's choice is why we have a divided land. Throughout history, individual choice has stood out as a tool God uses to make a point, open an eye or touch a heart, and He still uses it today.

Do you realize it's a choice when you get up out of bed in the morning? When you walk to the mailbox and say hello to your

neighbor, it's a choice. The same is true for those who back themselves into a corner, cutting the outside world off and refusing to be "tools of choice" for God. It's always a choice: "to be a tool or not to be a tool."

Have you thought of yourself as a tool before? As I pray, I ask God to make me into a usable vessel—a tool for His purpose. I don't place restrictive guidelines in my request. For example, I don't tell Him not to make me a broom because I hate cleaning. It's His will, His timing, but I have to make the choice to be available.

Too many believers today are choosing to die before their time. They don't see their usefulness and therefore sit around getting stagnant, waiting for the end to come and ease their "suffering." How sad! Hey, if you're still here, you have work to do!

Imagine getting to a place in your life where you would feel blessed whether you lived or died. That is exactly where Paul was in Philippians 1:21-24. Up to this point in his life, he had faced imprisonment, beatings and false accusations, to name a few challenges. He was running for his life, yet he still maintained a willingness to continue on course sharing the Good News until God decided to remove him from his situation. Paul was the ever-sharp pruning shears; no matter the thickness of the branch or the thorns he had to go through, he remained steadfast, looking toward the goal.

Maybe that's where we fail today—we have no goal! Maybe we are living day to day spiritually with no direction or "tool" recognition. If we don't recognize our purpose, it's hard to judge our effectiveness. Without guidelines or a measuring stick, we most often see failure. The suggestion of failure plants the seed of uselessness, and from uselessness comes—nothing. Therefore, our spirit gives in to the weak flesh and ceases to be a tool at all. We settle to just be—and we die before our time.

Here is some encouragement: Life does not need to be that way. If we choose to discover our purpose, God will surely open doors and windows of opportunity. Never allow age or physical condition to be a determining factor in your effectiveness. Just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, effectiveness is in the heart of the believer. Choose to be a Paul; he never wore a watch but was always on time. He lived his entire ministry with a thorn in his side. He did not prepare his speeches but always said the right words.

My goodness, he didn't even have someone telling him what to wear, yet he continued to impact lives in every level of society. He recognized his purpose, relied on the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and stayed on task until he was removed from it, literally.

To answer the question "How do I recognize my purpose?" walk this way:

1. Write down things you enjoy doing. (Most people find their gifts are what they enjoy doing in the first place.)
2. Spend time daily in God's Word. (Seek clarity of purpose and open windows of opportunity.)
3. Enlist the prayer of godly individuals who will hold you to task. (That's accountability.)
4. Be ever diligent in looking for the open windows. (Don't wait to be asked—step out and take action. If it's where God wants you to be, He will affirm you through your spirit and through others.)

I believe if we take to heart this action and apply it to our lives, we too will live with the anticipation of Paul: "For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better" (Phil. 1:21-22, NLT).

Will you choose to “live” for Christ today? Choose to be a source of strength for others around you in the midst of your challenges. When you feel the weight of the world on your shoulders, maybe it’s because you are trying to carry the load alone. Reach out and share the load. As believers, we are all heading to the same destination.

And, most importantly, don’t give up on life because of your circumstances; excel in spite of them.

I would love to hear from you and the choices you made today. May God bless you greatly as you seek His guidance and open windows of opportunity.

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