

Finding God's Specific Call and Passion

Turning 69 earlier this month, which soberingly means entering my seventieth year and eighth decade, makes me tremble with joyful eagerness not to waste my life. As the year and the decade turn, I have been thinking about Jesus's final words, "Teach [all the nations] to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). Not just to know what I commanded, but to observe it—obey it, do it. The last command of the Lord was, "Teach the nations in such a way that they obey me."

So I invite you to follow me as I meditate on not wasting my life in view of this final command.

The Ultimate Purpose of the Son and the Father

I want to live my life—what remains of it—in the service of the most ultimate purposes of God. It seems to me that this is how Paul tried to live his life. "It is my eager expectation and hope that ... Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death" (Phil. 1:20). Making much of Christ in life and death was Paul's ultimate goal, because it is God's ultimate goal—and Christ's.

Yes, even the ultimate goal of Christ Himself is the magnifying of Christ so that the Father would be magnified in him. These were not separate goals—Christ magnified and God magnified. Each happened in the other. Thus Jesus prayed,

Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may also glorify You. ... I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me in Your own presence with the glory which I had with You before the world existed" (John 17:1, 4-5).

Jesus prayed that He would be glorified. The glorification of Christ was the goal of Christ. Why? Because when the Father glorifies the Son, the glory of the Son magnifies the glory of the Father.

“I want to live my life in the service of the most ultimate purposes of God.”

And this is the Father's intention as well as the Son's. When the Son pursues the Father's glory, He is obeying the Father. “‘Now My soul is troubled. What shall I say? “Father, save Me from this hour”? Instead, for this reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘I have glorified it, and will glorify it again’” (John 12:27-28).

The glorification of the Father was the goal of the Father. Likewise, the exaltation of the Son by the Father was for the glory of the Father. “Therefore God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name which is above every name ... to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9, 11). The Father raised the Son for the glory of the Father (Phil. 2:9-11). And the Son prayed that it would be so (John 17:1).

Joining the Son and the Father in Their Ultimate Purpose

Jesus taught us to plead with the Father that we might successfully join Him in this ultimate purpose. “Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name” (Matt. 6:9). In other words, Father, cause Me and all the world to revere and treasure the infinite worth of Your holy name above all created reality. Make Your glorious name (Your person) the supreme passion of My heart and life.

Hence, I want to join Paul (and Jesus, and the Father) in living my life in the service of the most ultimate purposes of God.

Joining God in His Penultimate Purposes

But how shall we do that? Paul not only spoke of pursuing the ultimate purpose of God, but of lower purposes as a means to that ultimate purpose. So did Jesus. Jesus said, "For this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37). "The Son of Man came ... to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). "I came that they might have life" (John 10:10). These are glorious, but not ultimate. They serve the ultimate—the glorification of God.

Similarly, Paul spoke of purposes for his life that were not ultimate, but served the ultimate. He said, for example, that the only worth he gave to his life was to "finish the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

Why such a riveted focus on a life devoted to the Word? Because people are born again only through the living and abiding Word (1 Pet. 1:23), and because faith comes only from being born again (1 John 5:1), and because obedience comes only through faith (Gal. 5:6; 2 Thess. 1:11), and because the "obedience of faith" is the only life that glorifies God (Rom. 4:20).

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But for Paul the goal of life became even more specific.

His calling and passion was "to bring the nations to obedience" (Rom. 15:18). And here we circle back to where we started—the second half of the Great Commission. It seems to me that Paul had meditated on Jesus' Great Commission, specifically the words, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). Not just, "Teach them all that I have commanded you," but, "Teach them to observe—to keep, obey, do—all that I have commanded you." Do this as you make disciples of "all nations."

And Paul knew that the only way to bring the nations to such obedience was to make it his life aim to bring about the obedience of faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, when he paraphrased the Great Commission for his own life, the second half of Jesus's commission sounded like this: It is "the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith" (Rom. 16:26). That's Paul's way of saying, "Teach them to obey all that I have commanded you." And be sure this obedience is the obedience of faith. Why? Because that is how the obedience happens to the glory of God. Hence he attaches to this "great commission" the words, "To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ!" (Rom. 16:27).

So here I am, at the outset of my 70th year and eighth decade. And there boils inside of me a zeal to fulfill the Great Commission. Especially the second half—"Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you." Which means: Bend every effort, use every means, go deep, go broad, pray much, be filled with the Spirit—all to the end that the peoples of the world might obey everything Jesus commanded, by faith in His grace, for the glory of God.

Find your specific calling, and join me. The time is short—"What is your life? A mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes" (James 4:14). Night is coming when no man can work (John 9:4).

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