

Why Your Purpose Is Not the Same as Your Vocation

Do you wonder what you're supposed to be doing with your life? Do you wonder if you're in the right job or following the right career path? You're not alone when you think about things like that. Many people wonder about the purpose of their life and their vocation.

But it can get a little disheartening if you start entangling your life purpose with the job you work at every day. Because while jobs come and go, your life purpose is set inside of God's specific and beautiful design of your life.

It's easy to intermix your life purpose—or identity—with your vocation. They often are entangled, but they are unique and different. One is about your God-gifted value, and that has nothing to do with work. It has to do with your personality, your passion and your preferences. The other is about your vocational expression of those things.

For many people, me included, the two get so intertwined that they seem like one big thing. But they're not. And understanding that will make you feel a lot less pressure and give you a ton of understanding. So let's separate them out.

Identity is who you are. And who you are is what defines you and your worth. You are made in the image of God. You are unique. There is no one like you. That uniqueness includes your gifting, your personality, your skill set. God crafted you with his design in mind. You were made by God and for God (see Col. 1:16). And you are called to be a minister to God and others. That is who you are. That is your life purpose.

The vocation part is your work and what you choose to do with your time, and there's a lot of wiggle room inside that. I think most people, during the course of their life, do a lot

of different things vocationally. For me, I can think of about 10 jobs I've had between the ages of 20 and 50. I've been a preschool teacher, a drama instructor, a public speaker, an author, a radio co-host. I've created small businesses that created income to help with our family budget.

Vocationally, I've been all over the map. If I defined my worth or identity by my ability to stay the course doing one thing vocationally or by making big money, I'd feel like a colossal failure. Instead, I stay focused on my identity before God. I am made by him and for him, and in all the things I've chosen to do, I try to honor him.

Theologian Richard Foster says it like this: "My whole life, in one sense, he has been an experiment in how to be a portable sanctuary, learning to practice the presence of God" (*Prayers From the Heart*). Everywhere you go, as you practice the presence of God in your lives, you're like a small sanctuary to the people closest by. So that means when you're on the way to work and you interact with the barista in the morning, you're standing there as a respite. Giving life and comfort to the person you're talking to.

Or maybe as you hold your infant, or read to your toddler, you're offering them sanctuary as you abide with God. Maybe in your high-pressure job, with people who don't know or maybe even care about God, there you are, a portable sanctuary. A daily relief. It's that simple.

A lot of times, I think we try to make this connection between our identity and our vocation too intense and difficult. Like maybe being a minister for God always means you should pack up your life and move to a third-world country to be a missionary. And you could be called to that, and it would be dreamy and romantic in a sacrificial kind of way. But more likely, your ministry to God is just right where you are, in your home and at your work. {eoa}

Susie Davis is an author, speaker and co-founder of Austin Christian Fellowship. She is married to her high school sweetheart, Will Davis Jr., and they have three young adult children (Will III, Emily and Sara) who are all married. Her other books include *Loving Your Man Without Losing Your Mind*, *Parenting Your Teen and Loving It* and *Unafraid: Trusting God in an Unsafe World*.

Susie's podcast, "*Dear Daughters*," is full of wisdom and joy, offering women young and old the kind of comfort and companionship they crave. Visit her website: .

This article is an edited excerpt from Susie's new book, *Dear Daughters: Love Letters to the Next Generation*.

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