

Our need for purpose

In 2002 Rick Warren captured the nonprofit hardcover market with *The Purpose Driven Life*. It was and is a guide to a 40-day spiritual journey to enable readers “to discover the answer to life’s most important question: What on earth am I here for?” and know God’s purpose for the your life (p. 9).



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Warren uses a simple acrostic – SHAPE – to discuss God’s purpose for your personal life: Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality and Experience. God gives spiritual gifts to equip believers to serve Him. “You can’t earn your spiritual gifts or desire them — that is why they are called *gifts*” (p. 236). But you can live in such a way that your gifts are expressed in the practice of your fruits.

For our purpose in this lesson, we will focus on spiritual gifts as an example of what the New Testament calls “the fruit of the Spirit.” As can be seen in Paul’s explanation of fruit, it is a behavioral expression of one’s commitment to Christ. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23a).

To bear much fruit we must abide in Christ (John 15:1-4). As Jesus used the term “fruit,” it identifies the life that is productive of obedient service for him. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

New Testament scholar Marcus Dods emphasizes this truth in his exposition of the Gospel of John in the Expositor’s Greek Testament. “Maintain your belief in Me,” declares Jesus, “your attachment to

me, your derivation of hope, sin and motives from me; and I will abide in you, filling you with all the life you need to represent me on earth. All of the divine energy you know to be in me will now pass through you” (Vol. 1, p. 829).

When the branches bear no fruit, the heavenly Father, who is the vinedresser, prunes them to restore fruitfulness. Anyone who has grown grape vines will identify the essential method of producing better yields. I have never grown grape vines, but my former rose beds of about 70 plants required the same care for increased blossoms.

At times, our productivity is enhanced by the stress that pruning our lives to fulfill God’s purpose causes for us, even though we may not realize it at the time.

Jesus’ teaching is powerful and paradoxical (John 15: 2, 6). Southern Baptists, in the Baptist Faith and Message doctrinal statement, maintain that “all true believers endure to the end.” But Jesus declared that “if a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers, and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.”

It appears that the descriptive words for the ones rejected were not “true believers.” In several New Testament illustrations, persons who made some profession of faith in Christ acted in such a way as to deny the authenticity of that profession. For example, in the parable of the Sower, only one of the persons involved made a lasting commitment to the Lord and two were rejected because their faith commitment was not sufficient (Mark 4).

John commented on certain antichrists who left the church because “they went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they

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Scripture: John 15:1-8

had been of us, they would have continued with us” (1 John 2:19). These men were “not kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” as affirmed in the Faith and Message document. This was not a lack of God’s power but of their unwillingness to make a lasting commitment to Christ.

God is glorified through the fruit borne for him (John 15:8).

“The disciples who bear fruit for Jesus and the Father “prove to be my disciples.” As the old saying goes, “the proof is in the pudding!” Jesus cautioned that false disciples could be identified by the fruit they produced. Authentic believers demonstrated their fruit in the quality of their lives. Their purpose is to behave appropriately as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Two important words occur in the next section of John’s gospel: obedience and joy. Jesus declared, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” The Greek word translated “joy” has about it a sense of surprise and excitement. Jesus is teaching us that the result of our obedience to his will for our life results in the exciting and liberating experience of his love—“that your joy may be full.”

The hymn chorus celebrates this joy: “Floods of joy o’er my soul like the sea billows roll, since Jesus came into my heart.” This is all part of the Father’s purpose for our lives which we can enjoy in serving him with our spiritual insights and joyous service.

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