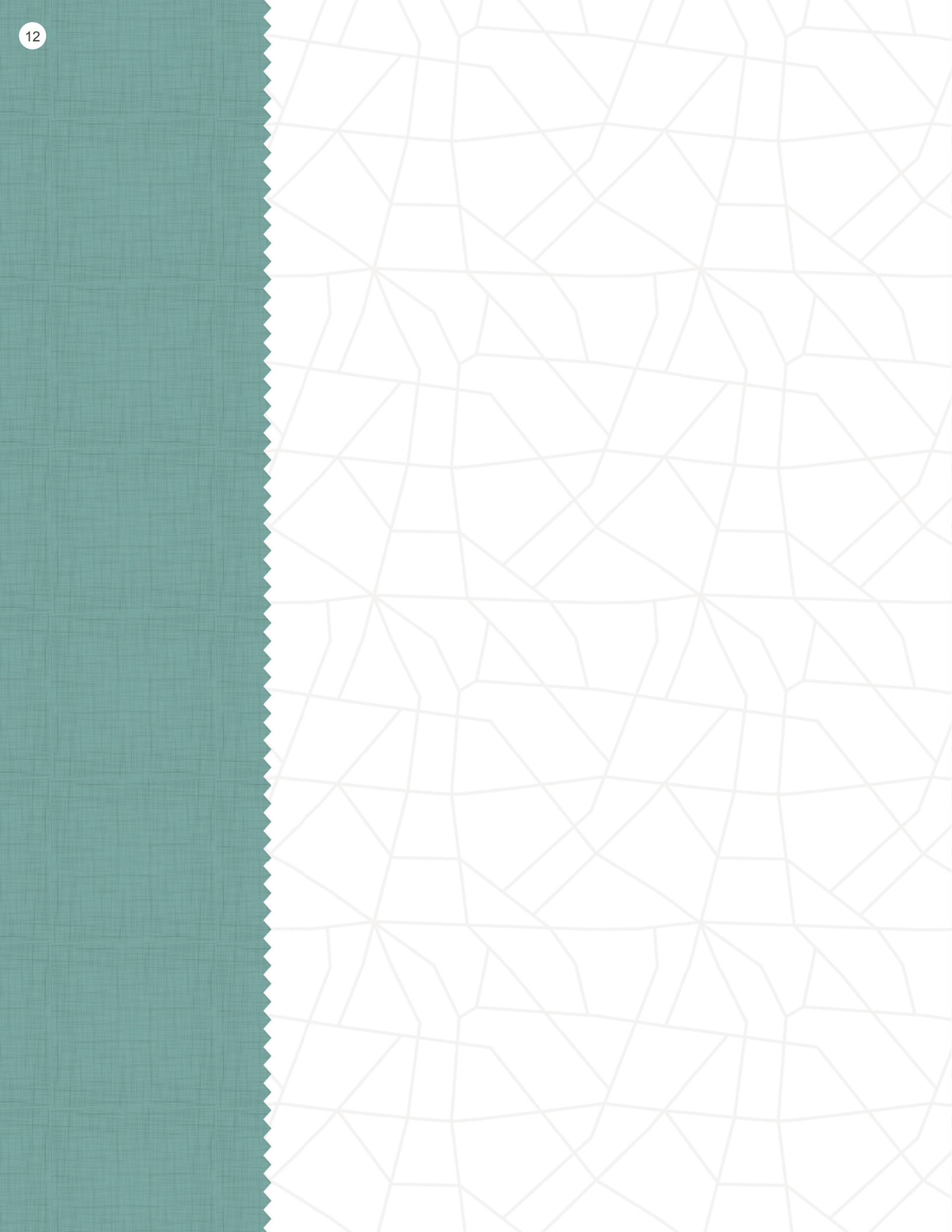


LESSON 1

Something's Missing

A WOMAN WHO HAS
EMBRACED HER PURPOSE
IS A WOMAN WHO IS
POISED TO CHANGE
THE WORLD.





LESSON
1

Something's Missing

Meaning in life comes from participating in God's purposes.

—Dr. Larry Crabb

Begin each day of study with prayer:

“Lord, help me become the woman You created me to be and discover my unique contribution to Your kingdom on earth. Show me insights about myself and about You that I've not seen before. Remove any distractions from my mind and environment so that I will be able to enter Your presence and hear Your voice clearly. Lord, I just want to be Yours and to live my life Your way. In Jesus' Name. Amen.”

You matter. You are here on Planet Earth for a reason, placed here by a Creator who has designs on your life. There is something you are meant to do *in* the world, *for* the world. Something you are meant to give others. You were created for a purpose by a purposeful, orderly God. When He planned a world that was both beautiful and efficient, He filled it with human beings and decided to include you. Why?

The Creator planned that every person would play a part and help the Universe work as it should. To some He gave what humans consider big jobs. To others, simple assignments. But to Him, every task was immensely important for the working of the whole. Each person, each tiny baby He fashioned, had—*has*—an important purpose to fulfill. You were created to *do something* to make the world a better place. You were created for a purpose.

If this resonates with you, perhaps it is because your Creator embedded in your very DNA the notion that you're here to make a difference. Try as you might, you simply cannot shake the dream-like longing you have for just that—a role to play that is significant. At times you tell yourself to give it up, adjust your attitude and just be content. But you can't do it. Deep within, you know there is more to life than *this*. You realize there's a reason you are here. Your existence is not random. You matter.

You were created for a purpose by a purposeful, orderly God.

Resonate:
ˈrɛ-zə-nāt\ verb.
to relate harmoniously;
to strike a chord.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (Ephesians 2:10, NASB).

I wonder what good works God prepared for me to walk in? A few years ago, I didn't have a clue how to answer that question—and it bothered me! Today, I'm convinced that God wants each one of us to answer it. I believe that He not only prepared good works for us to do but also embedded in us a gene labeled "I'm here to make a difference." Then He tossed into our wiring an appetite for those very good works, as well as the ability to do them. In addition, God set it up so that nothing less than the life He planned for us—with those good works included—satisfies. No amount of money, good fortune or even quality relationships will do. Unless we pursue the purpose for which we were created, we will feel bereft. We'll know something's missing.

Unfortunately, millions of people will never be bothered by the question of purpose or destiny. They're eking out a bare-bones existence, struggling to survive and keep the kids fed and safe. Mothers whose children are hungry don't have the luxury of dreaming about what God created them to do to make a difference. Their options about how they spend their time, resources and talents are few.

But what about the rest of us? What about the millions of people across this country and around the world who have options to live life outside survival mode? What about those with margin in their lives and the freedom to direct their time and energy—at least some portion of it—where they want it to go?

Surveying the landscape of the world where I live, I see some of the world's most fortunate women. We don't have to labor under the gender bias our mothers and grandmothers faced a few decades ago. Relative to the rest of the world, many twenty-first century women have options that are unparalleled in history. We *can* work, but many of us don't *have* to in order to survive. Those of us who do have jobs outside the home want to use our gifts and follow our God-given passions. We want to do something that matters. But what?

Huge numbers of women across the planet have the greatest opportunity the world has ever known to live life the way we choose. Yet, as I look around me, I see few women having a really good time. Instead of

Bereft :

/be-reft/ adj.
deprived; lacking; feeling
sense of loss.

Margin:

/mar-gin/ noun.
the space between your
load and your capacity;
breathing room.

We want to do
something that
matters. But what?

difference-makers with the world's needs in view, I see pleasure-seekers, helicopter moms and grandmothers and frustrated, restless, would-be difference-makers with no sense of direction, passion or energy. As one directionless friend described it, "I feel kind of, you know, *floaty*. Like I'm not sure where I'm going—a bit unmoored. And it doesn't feel good." Few women I know are living what I, or they, would call the abundant life, a life rich with deep meaning and joy. This includes women who are actively pursuing a life of faith, studying God's Word and involved in their churches and communities. What's the deal?

Let's just get real about it: God has graciously provided us with an abundance of tangible blessings and freedoms. How can we sit idly by and waste the opportunities He has given us? "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required." (Luke 12:48)

Years ago, I was confused and frustrated with life, yet free to choose something better. Though I'd been a committed Christian for more than twenty years, I didn't have a clue what Paul meant when he told his friend Timothy to "take hold of the eternal life to which you were called...take hold of that which is life indeed" (1 Timothy 6:12,19). That worried me.

Life indeed. What is it? How do I get it? What's wrong with me—and the women around me? What's missing?

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Driven to find answers, I began to seek God in a new way. I struggled with Him and rattled the bars of the cage in which I found myself. Over time, I was able to connect the dots of my life. Remember the puzzles that our first-grade teachers handed out? When we connected the numbered dots on the page, an image would begin to form. The picture that emerged always surprised and delighted me.

I recently traced the dots of my life, the defining moments and epiphanies that marked each twist and turn of my path. As I did, confusion and questions gave way to clarity and answers.

Will you join me as we journey together toward another picture, a vision of abundant life that God handed us in His Word and etched on the lining of our hearts?

Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called... take hold of that which is life indeed.
1 Timothy 6:12, 19

Over time, I was able to connect the dots of my life.

That's when it hit me: *I don't know who I am.*

DOT #1: FAKE WOMAN (AGE 25)

On Christmas Eve way back when I was in my twenties, an unexpected thought tiptoed across my consciousness: *I don't know who I am.* It jolted me! Earlier that night, I had oohed and aahed over every gift as if it were the one thing that would make my life complete. "Oh, just what I've alwaaays waaanted! How did you knooow? I looove it!!!" (Do you feel sick yet?) I actually caught my brother-in-law rolling his eyes at my exaggerated enthusiasm.

In the days that followed, I reflected on our gift exchange with embarrassment. What was I trying to prove? I had come across as a complete fake. And why? That's when it hit me: *I don't know who I am.*

DOT #2: NOWHERE WOMAN (AGE 25)

That question, along with a few others prompted by songs on the radio, caused me to ask other questions about life and myself:

Do you know where you're goin' to?

Do you like the things that life is showin' you?

Where are you goin' to? Do you know?

(Recorded by Diana Ross; written by Gerry Goffin and Michael Masser)

The famous Beatles tune:

He's a real nowhere man

Sitting in his nowhere land

Making all his nowhere plans for nobody.

Doesn't have a point of view

Knows not where he's going to

Isn't he a bit like you and me?

(Written by John Lennon and Paul McCartney)

With those "lyrical" questions gnawing at me, I was beginning to realize that life was one big question mark. And not very satisfying. For the first time in my life, I began to feel insecure and insignificant. Of all the questions swirling in my head, two rose to the surface: "Who am I?" and "What's the point of life?" I wondered if the two were connected. Was I supposed to be a part of some bigger design? If so, how?

DOT #3 GOD SPEAKS (AGE 26)

During this time of confusion, I awoke one morning feeling desperate. I cried out to God, “What is wrong with me? Why am I so clueless?” Much to my surprise, Someone answered.

“Nothing’s wrong with you, Linda,” the Voice said. “I made you. I love you.”

Just that simple. No, it wasn’t an audible voice, but it was crystal clear just the same. I came away from that encounter with a big fat exclamation point instead of a question mark:

“It’s all about God! The point of life is God!”

My life began to change. I bought a Bible and started going to church for the first time in more than a decade. In my newfound church home, one that friends heartily described as “on fire for Jesus,” I learned about the Creator of all life and about my personal Savior, Jesus Christ.

For the next two weeks, I asked Jesus to save me at least a dozen times until someone there convinced me that once was enough, *if* I was sincere, and I was! I had direction—at last! I had found the Target around which I would focus my life. **Life is not about me; it’s about God!**

As I began to grow spiritually, my family expanded and parenthood quickly took center stage in my life. To be sure, mothering consumed every waking moment for years to come, and even some of those moments meant for sleeping.

My quest for answers to big questions subsided as I focused on our four fabulous children, gifts from God who gave new meaning to life. Still, I found time to study God’s Word, pray and become involved in various leadership roles in my church. This was a very satisfying season of life!

As I reflect on the “dark night of my soul” that I experienced before having kids, I now realize that my search to know who I was and to find meaning in life was common among other women of that era. Is it really any different for today’s twenty-somethings who are searching for answers?

“It’s all about
God! The point
of life is God!”

In simple terms, I had an identity crisis. Though I had found one answer—*the point of life is God*—I had not figured out much else. In fact, it was two decades after that embarrassing Christmas Eve when I identified myself as a fake before I would resume my journey toward answers. Only then would I discover my true identity and find my place in God's kingdom.

DOT #4: I GUESS I JUST NEED TO GET A JOB (LATE 40's)

My first child was about to leave for college when I started having the symptoms. No, I wasn't physically sick, but I wasn't "well" either. That's when I first realized something was missing in my life. Confused and frustrated without knowing why, I was suffering from a "dis-ease" of the soul. Diagnosis: Failure to Thrive. I began to revisit the same questions I'd had in my twenties:

- Who am I?
- Is this all there is?
- Why am I here?

Just as so many women do, I began to think that the only solution for me was to get a job. Bringing home a paycheck would help me shake the profound sense of insignificance I was feeling. Connecting with co-workers every day would take away the loneliness, and receiving affirmation from a manager would make me feel valued once again.

I left behind my volunteer position as a leader in women's ministries and took a part-time position on staff at my church. Within a few months, I discovered that the job wasn't going to cure me of Failure to Thrive. While I loved my co-workers, my gifting did not fit the job. Instead of alleviating my discontent, it only served to underscore it. I didn't know what to do and became more restless than ever. What had been a brief identity crisis in my twenties had become a midlife crisis of staggering proportions in my forties. Something was missing, but what?

DOT #5: AHA! A HOLY ANNOUNCEMENT (LATE 40's)

I was almost fifty years old when I had another defining moment. Sitting on my living-room floor going through some old files, I ran across a folder of presentation notes for talks I'd given at various women's events. As I sat reading what I'd written, I lost all track of time. I rehearsed my stories and illustrations, pictured the faces of the women in the room and, yes, even laughed out loud at my jokes. Before I knew it, several hours had

Something was missing, but what?

passed. Suddenly, I knew what was missing. I was created to teach! I'm a teacher!

Like a lightning bolt, the pieces began to fall into place. Indeed, I had been teaching all my life! First, as a child playing school with neighborhood friends; many years later as a school teacher for eight years; more recently, as a lay leader in church-based women's ministry. Teaching thrilled my very soul!

That "aha" moment became a major turning point for me. I quit my job and asked God to use me for His purposes and to never let me become sidetracked again. The target I'd found decades ago—that *life is about God*—was too broad to give my life clear direction. Today, I have a **Target** with a brightly painted center, the **Bull's-eye**. I've found my "Ephesians 2:10 good works," and you can find yours, too

WIDESPREAD AILMENT

My experience in the Wilderness of Questions is not unique. Countless women across this country and all over the world are right where I was a few years ago—confused, discouraged and dissatisfied. They hail from all walks of life—the spiritually mature and those still seeking God, the young and not-so-young singles and marrieds, nest-builders and empty-nesters. If you are one of them, this course is for you.

My purpose in writing *Embracing Purpose* is not simply to examine and explain the condition that affects so many women, but to offer a cure—one that will grab hold of you, penetrate your heart and become a compelling vision. If you will pursue the cure, God will illuminate a path before you that, with commitment, you can follow. It will lead to a well-defined Target that is common to all believers and to your own unique Bull's-eye. In your pursuit, you will be able to embrace your purpose and experience an uncommon life—one that glorifies the Creator and satisfies you deep .

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

In your pursuit, you will be able to embrace your purpose and experience an uncommon life—one that glorifies the Creator and satisfies you deeply.

When you know the better life God has for you, you cannot “unknow” it.

Be forewarned! If you fail to complete the journey you’ve begun, your frustrations are likely to increase. The vision you encounter will not release its grip on you easily. When you know the better life God has for you, you cannot “unknow” it; once you experience the very pleasure of God, you will only want more!

GO LOOK

Picture the scene some two thousand years ago when a crowd of people gathered in a desolate place on the outskirts of town. They’d come to hear a new and controversial preacher named Jesus, who had been causing quite a stir. It was late in the day when Jesus’ disciples advised Him to send the crowd away so they could find something to eat. Those taking attendance counted five thousand men alone, so there were probably at least that many more women and children. That’s a lot of mouths to feed. Instead of sending them away, Jesus told his disciples:

³⁷“You give them something to eat... ³⁸How many loaves do you have? Go look!” And when they found out, they said, “Five, and two fish” (Mark 6:37-38).

Today, there are still a whole lot of people who are hungry, or as some put it, “food insecure.” In fact, many people today are insecure in lots of ways, and for the most part, with good reason. They’re insecure about their health and medical care, their mortgages, education, children, marriages, spirituality, their value, the future and the economy. People of the twenty-first century are every bit as needy and troubled as those of the first century .

Just as back then, some disciples of Jesus today would rather not bother with the needs of the hungry and otherwise needy minions. Others of us long to be used by God, but we don’t know how. We don’t know what He wants us to do or what we have to offer others. We wonder, *Do I even have anything of value to give?*

As He did with His disciples, Jesus challenges us today to give the hungry something to eat. Like them, we must “go look” to see what we have to offer. We must take personal inventory of what we have that will nourish and meet the needs of others.

We wonder, Do I even have anything of value to give?

This study is designed to help you do that. It's a personal "go look" guide, a self-discovery tool for counting the loaves and fish in your lunch sack. Second, it's a resource to see what the Bible says about who you are and what your purpose in life is. You were created for a purpose by God. The way He fashioned you and the experiences He has allowed to come into your life offer valuable clues to the nature of that purpose. When you discover it, you and the world around you will be blessed beyond belief, and God will be glorified

TWO DISTINCTIVES

When God created human beings, He determined two fundamentally important characteristics that would distinguish us from all other living creatures. The first concerned our identity; the second, our job description or role as it relates to the rest of creation.

IDENTITY FIRST

"God said, 'Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'" (Genesis 1:26). In those few simple words, the "triune" (three in one) God set us apart from all other created things. Mankind alone would bear the image of God. If we were to let ourselves feast on that fact about ourselves long enough, it would blow us away. Think about it:

You bear the image of God. *You*.

NEXT, JOB DESCRIPTION

God wasn't finished. After creating mankind, He gave them an incredibly important job to do: "And let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Genesis 1:26). After creating Adam and Eve in verse 27, God adds detail to their job description in verse 28. He said to them,

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

You bear the image
of God. *You*.

Open your heart and mind to His voice and call on your life.

Vital:
/vītL/ adj.
essential; indispensable;
very important.

Underline each verb (action word) in the verse above. What do those words mean for you and me, right here, today? As an image-bearer of God, how are you to “rule over” creation? How are you to be “fruitful and multiply,” to “fill” and “subdue” creation? Who are you, and what role are you to play?

This course is designed to help you answer these critical questions:

- *Who am I, and how has God designed me to be used by Him?*
- *What exactly does He want me to do?*

The first speaks to your identity, and the second deals with your job description, or the role you were created to play in the world.

As you have read (or will read), there was a time when I desperately needed to hear from God on precisely these two issues. Just as He spoke into the lives of the first man and woman in a very personal way, He spoke into my own.

God wants to speak to you, as well. As you begin this journey, listen to Him. Open your heart and mind to His voice and call on your life. My hope and prayer is that through this study you will find answers about these two very important aspects of your life: your identity and your God-given job description. Believe me, it will delight both you and God when you do.

SELF-DISCOVERY

Do you want to know who you are and how you were created by God to become a vital piece of the kingdom puzzle He’s assembling? God wants you to know maybe even more than you want to know yourself! He has so much more in store for you than you ever dreamed possible. He has planned a divine connection, where your life converges with His grand purposes on Planet Earth. He has already envisioned it. *Embracing Purpose* is about that divine connection.

God’s Purposes + Your Strengths = Divine Connection

God wants you to discover the divine connection that He has planned for you. His goal isn’t to keep it hidden from you. Press into God, and He will direct your path. Then you can prepare to live your life to the fullest!

As we begin this journey of self-discovery together, let's look first at a prayer that Paul prayed for the Christ-followers of his day. (Note: Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Version unless otherwise noted; other translations may differ slightly.)

¹⁷[I pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe (Ephesians 1:17-19).

My prayer for you echoes that of Paul's in this passage. I pray that you would:

- Know **Christ**.
- Know **who you are in Christ**.
- Know **what you have in Christ: a calling, riches and great power**.

1 Read 1 Corinthians 11:26-32.

²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. ²⁷Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. ²⁸But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. ³⁰For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. ³¹But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. ³²But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

What are we told to do in this passage before participating in the Lord's Supper (or Communion)? (Write answer(s) below or in the margin.)

2 Read Psalm 51:6. According to this verse, what does God desire? What do you think it means?

*Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,
And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.*

I pray that you would know what you have in Christ: a calling, riches and great power.

*Behold, You desire truth
in the innermost being,
And in the hidden part
You will make me know
wisdom.
Psalm 51:6*

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.
Psalm 139:23-24

3 Read Psalm 15:1-3.

Who may abide in God's tent and dwell on His holy hill?

¹*Lord, who may abide in Your tent?*

Who may dwell on Your holy hill?

²*He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness,
And speaks truth in his heart.*

³*He does not slander with his tongue,
Nor does evil to his neighbor,
Nor takes up a reproach against his friend.*

4 Read Psalm 139:23-24 and underline what the psalmist is asking God to do.

²³*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me and know my anxious thoughts;*

²⁴*And see if there be any hurtful way in me,
And lead me in the everlasting way.*

- Is the examination of your heart for God's enlightenment or for your own?
- How do you know? (See verse 24)

5 Read Psalm 26:1-12.

¹*Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity,
And I have trusted in the Lord without wavering.*

²*Examine me, O Lord, and try me;
Test my mind and my heart.*

³*For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes,
And I have walked in Your truth.*

⁴*I do not sit with deceitful men,
Nor will I go with pretenders.*

⁵*I hate the assembly of evildoers,
And I will not sit with the wicked.*

⁶*I shall wash my hands in innocence,
And I will go about Your altar, O Lord,*

⁷*That I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving*

And declare all Your wonders.

⁸O Lord, I love the habitation of Your house

And the place where Your glory dwells.

⁹Do not take my soul away along with sinners,

Nor my life with men of bloodshed,

¹⁰In whose hands is a wicked scheme,

And whose right hand is full of bribes.

¹¹But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity;

Redeem me, and be gracious to me.

¹²My foot stands on a level place;

In the congregations I shall bless the Lord.

Here, King David models self-examination. In the first verse he talks with God about his personal integrity and enumerates specifics about both his heart and his behavior. In verse 2 he asks God to examine, try and test his mind and heart. In the remaining verses we see David doing just that: examining his own life and telling God what he's found. Fill in the blanks below.

Verse 3: Your lovingkindness is before me. I walk in Your

Verse 4: I don't associate with

Verse 5: I stay away from

Verse 6: I wash my hands in

Verse 8: I love

Verse 11: I shall walk in

This psalm, as well as many others, illustrates the process the writer must have undertaken to bare his soul before God. He clearly had to explore self in light of scripture. The Greek philosopher Plato said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Without honest self-examination, one

"The unexamined life is not worth living." —Plato

Self-study to gain self-awareness is necessary in order to apply God's word so that we might become conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

that invites the scrutiny of the Holy Spirit, we cannot know where, how or when we fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). We cannot confess sin and be cleansed (1 John 1:8-10). We cannot walk in a manner worthy of the Lord (Colossians 1:10) as new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17), putting off the old nature and living by the Spirit (Galatians 5).

Some believers shy away from the word "self," but the fact is, self-study to gain self-awareness is necessary in order to apply God's Word so that we might become conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Our destiny is to be like Jesus (Romans 8:29).

- 6 Do you ever wonder: Why did I say or do that? Why am I getting anxious in this situation? What's really bothering me? Is what he or she said about me true? These questions are introspective, indicating healthy curiosity about your internal world. Certain personalities are more prone to introspection than others. Are you introspective by nature? Explain.

My prayer for you is that you will not only come to know your heavenly Father intimately, but that you will also truly come to know yourself. For the duration of the study, put yourself at the top of your priority list. The goal is not to become self-absorbed but self-aware in order to discover how to partner with God in accomplishing His will on earth. With the knowledge and insights you obtain, I believe you will be emboldened with personal confidence and courage to become your truest self, to reach your full potential and to be used by God.

Embolden:
/emböldən/ verb.
to foster boldness or
courage in; encourage.

YOUR FAMILY STORIES

Bob Buford begins his book *Halftime* with this insightful statement: "I have not always paid attention to my life." It sounds like a bizarre comment, but I get it. Throughout this course, we will be paying attention to all aspects of our lives and engaging in self-discovery. Why? Our past, present and the future we hope for hold valuable clues about our unique design. If we will reflect on our stories and share what we find with others, we will deepen our self-awareness.

You will begin the self-discovery process by writing your family stories: the family of your childhood and the family you have today as an adult. Then you will share highlights in your small groups. (With everyone sharing and being vulnerable, it won't be so awkward—trust me.)

As you go through this material, above all be honest. This is your personal journey of self-discovery, so it's counterproductive to gloss over the truth. Be 100% honest—with yourself and with God. You do not have to share every detail or every self-discovery answer in your small group if you are uncomfortable doing so. I am praying, however, that you will have the courage to stretch beyond your comfort zones just a little and trust that God is at work in you right now. He loves you and accepts you just as you are. So, rest in Him as you begin your self-discovery!

YOUR CHILDHOOD FAMILY

Your story is important. Here's what one of my favorite authors, Sue Monk Kidd, has to say about the inward journey:

Discovering our personal stories is a spiritual quest. Without such stories, we cannot be fully human, for without them we are unable to articulate or even understand our deepest experiences...The inner story creates identity, transforming our vision of who we are. Creating story is an act of self-knowing.¹

I agree. This exercise is the first step in your self-discovery process. Before you begin to record the highlights of your life, pray that God will deepen your awareness of significant experiences

“Lord, as I reflect on my life story, both as a child and an adult, help me become aware of significant events, relationships, losses and blessings that shaped me into the woman I am today. Help me also see what served to mis-shape me into someone You never intended. And then, Lord, help me find my way back to the real me, the me You intended when You created me. Please guide me in Jesus' Name. Amen.”

Write your story in the space provided, adding paper if needed. The following questions are provided to prompt you to include significant information. Answer only those that are key to your personal story. Using bullet points, phrases, complete sentences or paragraphs, include anything you deem significant about your life; leave out unimportant

“The inner story creates identity, transforming our vision of who we are. Creating story is an act of self-knowing.”
—Sue Monk Kidd

¹Sue Monk Kidd, *Firstlight* (New York, NY: Guideposts Books, 2006), 16-17.

details. Instead of simply recording facts about your life, open yourself up to your inner story.

YOUR CHILDHOOD FAMILY

- What is unique or significant about your parents' families, your parents, siblings and other family members?
- Were you happy as a child? Explain.
- Describe the best and worst experiences of your life as a child.
- Describe your spiritual roots, if any, as a child.
- What losses did you experience, both literally (death, wounds, tragedy) and figuratively (loss of innocence, childhood, personhood, relationship, etc.)?
- What blessings did you experience?
- Relationally, where are you today with your original family?
- Record any insights or lessons you have learned about yourself.

MY CHILDHOOD FAMILY

YOUR ADULT FAMILY

- Who are the members of your present-day family? (If you are single, with or without children, you may want to treat as “family” any significant relationships in your life.)
- What is unique about your present family?
- What losses and blessings, literally and figuratively, have you experienced?
- Do you generally think of yourself as happy or unhappy? Explain.
- Describe your adult spiritual journey and where you are now with your faith.
- What lessons and insights have you learned about yourself?

MY ADULT FAMILY

HIGHLIGHTING KEY PARTS

During your small group time this week, you will be given fifteen minutes (total) to share your Childhood Family and Adult Family stories. Prepare to share what is most significant by reviewing what you have written and highlighting the key experiences and relationships that served to shape you into the woman you are today. By doing this, you will find it much easier to limit your sharing to the allotted time.

Personal note: Many of us have difficult stories to share. As you decide what to share with your group, keep in mind the goal of “honesty with modesty.”² You can be honest about your life without sharing details that would make you and others uncomfortable.

CONNECTING WITH GOD

Take time to connect with God and reflect on the journey ahead. Start with two key concepts highlighted in this lesson: your identity and your job description.

- *What does it mean that I am created in Your image, Lord?
How am I like You?*
- *How did You create me to rule, subdue, be fruitful and multiply?
Help me understand the divine connection You planned for us.*

Write your reflections below .

²“Honesty with modesty” is a phrase used by Beth Moore in her teaching.

This journey has the potential to change your life. Only as you connect with God will you be able to connect with the real you that God intended as He wove you in your mother's womb. Without His help, you will be greatly hampered. Call on Him daily.

SUMMING UP

- You matter. You are here on Planet Earth for a reason, placed here by a Creator who has designs on your life.
- God set it up so that nothing less than the life He planned for us truly satisfies
- Huge numbers of people across the planet have the greatest opportunity the world has ever known to live life the way we choose.
- God's Purposes + Your Strengths = Divine Connection
- The unexamined life is not worth living. —Plato

Only as you connect with God will you be able to connect with the real you that God intended as He wove you in your mother's womb.



LESSON ONE VIDEO MESSAGE NOTES

Something's Missing

We live in a world full of _____ people.

The most important event that historians will see when they look back on our time... is an unprecedented change in the human condition...

_____ have _____. (Drucker)

NEW REALITIES

- We are the _____
- _____
- _____-Educated
- _____ women in all of history.

Given the choices, we will have to _____ ourselves and we are totally _____ for it. (Drucker)

Something's missing alright, and it's not just that we don't know our _____.

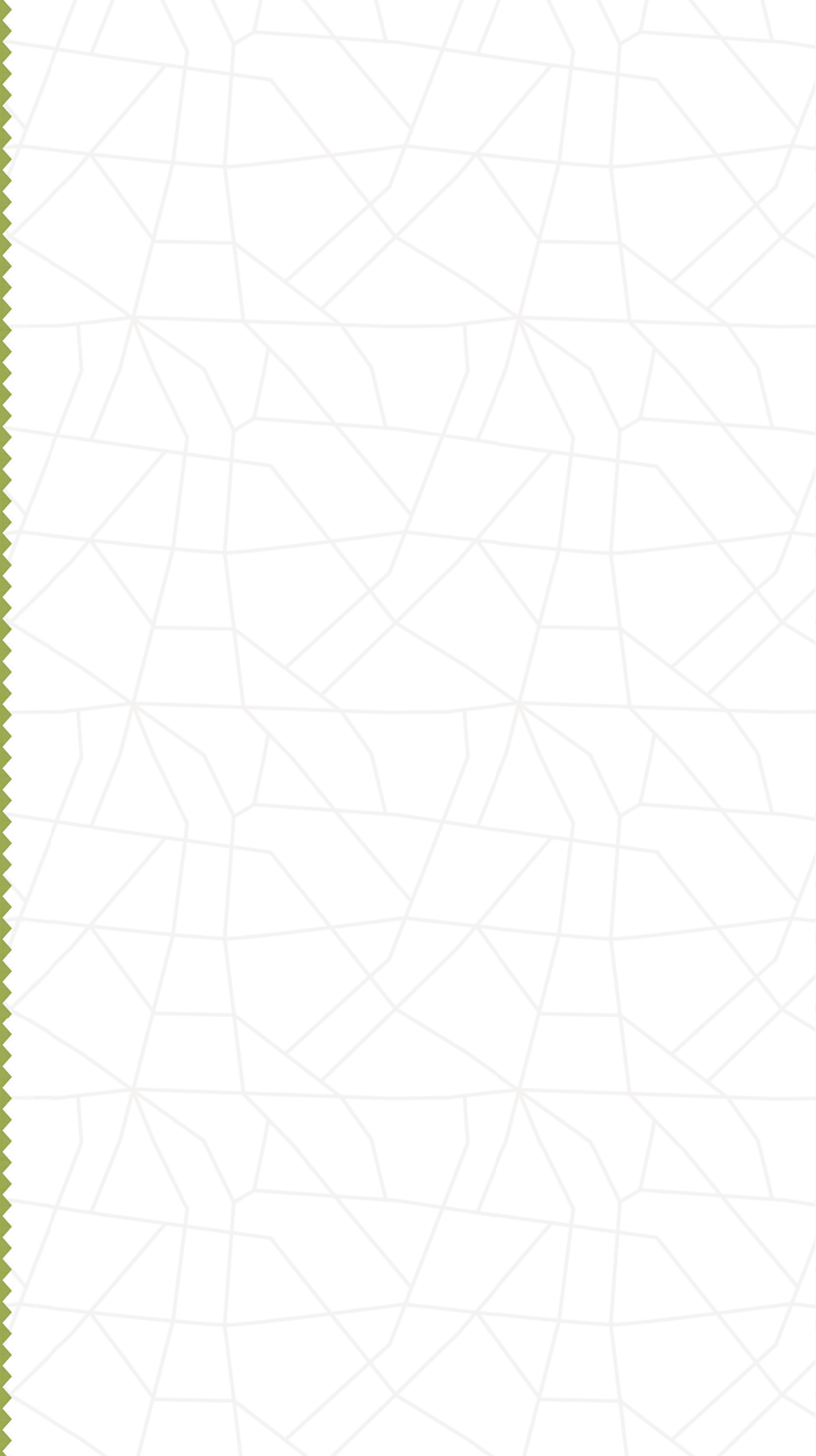
- We're missing the ability to _____ ourselves.
- We're also missing _____.

I do _____ ; help me in my _____ (Mark 9:24).

LESSON 2

Created for
a Purpose





Created for a Purpose

You are not your own...for you have been bought with a price. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Begin each lesson with prayer:

“Lord, teach me through this study and Your Word. Guide me to truth in my innermost being. Why did you create me? Help me to examine myself honestly in light of Your Word so that I can live my life more purposefully and pleasing to You. Lord, give me understanding of You and of me, for You are my Creator. Open the eyes of my heart and help me to see myself as You see me. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.”

WHAT'S MY PURPOSE?

We have all asked that question in one form or another:

Why am I here? What's the point of life? What is most important?

Ask a hundred people and you are likely to hear a hundred different answers. Scores of books have been written on this subject. Philosophers and theologians have discussed these ideas down through the centuries.

In my twenties I came to know Christ as Savior and found an exclamation point that would change my life forever: Life's all about God! Years later, however, I found myself saying to God, “Could You have been a little more specific back then? ‘Life is about You’ is a bit vague to help fine-tune the direction of my life.” I wanted something concrete. Maybe finding out what was most important to God, the Creator of all life, would help. I needed to search the scriptures.

WHOSE ARE YOU?

- 1 Read what the apostle Paul wrote to the Christians living in Corinth. Underline the main thoughts.

¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

LESSON 2

I wanted something concrete. Maybe finding out what was most important to God, the Creator of all life, would help.

*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus Our Lord.
Romans 6:23*

The image Paul is communicating in this scripture is that being bought or redeemed with a price makes you His and not your own. To understand more about who bought you and why, answer the following questions after reading two verses in Romans:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

2 What's true of all of us according to Romans 3:23?

3 According to Romans 6:23:
What do we deserve as sinners?

What is the free gift we are given instead?

Who offers that gift?

4 In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul explains the gospel of Jesus in the simplest terms and claims it is of "first importance." According to these verses, what is the gospel? Stated another way, what exactly did Jesus do?

¹Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you...²and by which also you are saved...³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, ⁵and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; ⁸and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also (1 Corinthians 15:1, 3-8).

In both 1 Corinthians 6 and 15, Paul is saying that what Jesus did changes everything. For those of us who choose to receive Christ's sacrifice on the cross as our own, we no longer belong to ourselves. We belong to Jesus because He bought us with His life. That decision alters the entire trajectory of our lives.

Before returning to the topic of purpose, let's take a closer look at that decision and the significance of the gospel message.

We belong to Jesus because He bought us with His life.

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

Between God and humanity, there is a huge gap created by man's sinful nature (Isaiah 59:2). We cannot have a relationship with God because He is completely holy—and we are not. The way to bridge the gap, according to God's Word, is to accept the one and only provision that He allows: Jesus' substitutionary death for our sins (Romans 6:23). You and I cannot bridge the gap on our own, no matter how good we are or how hard we try. No amount of money donated to good causes and to the church will bridge the gap. We can't go to church enough or read our Bible enough to close the gap. The only remedy is to receive Christ as Lord and begin to follow Him (John 1:11-12, 10:27).

When we make that choice, a glorious thing happens: Jesus takes on our sin, and we take on His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). This verse is often referred to as the Great Exchange: "He (God) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." We not only belong to Christ, we become like Him. We are the righteousness of God because of Jesus. What a miracle!

Jesus, the sinless God-Man, became sin...and sinful man became righteous. But the exchange doesn't happen automatically. God will not force this gift of salvation on us. We either choose to accept or reject God's provision. If we do choose Christ as our Savior, our sin is wiped out—paid in full.

The choice requires a leap of faith. Then and only then is a relationship between God and man possible. So simple a plan, yet so profound it changes everything.

If you have not yet made a decision to receive Christ as Lord of your life, I encourage you to turn to the back of the book and read the addendum titled "Choosing Christ" before continuing.

Once we have made the choice to receive Christ as our Savior, how are we to live in relationship with Him? What difference should the gospel and the Great Exchange make in the way we live our lives? Paul provides the answer in 1 Corinthians 6:20.

We are the
righteousness
of God because
of Jesus. What a
miracle!

- 5 In the margin, write the last phrase of 1 Corinthians 6:20 (see question #1), beginning with “therefore:”

The same truth is expressed in other passages. Let’s take a look at a few so we can answer the question posed at the beginning of this lesson with confidence: What’s my purpose, the most important thing?

*Everyone who is called by My name,
And whom I have created for My glory,
Whom I have formed, even whom I have made (Isaiah 43:7).*

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (1 Pet. 4:11).

According to these passages, what is your purpose?

The entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation, shines a floodlight on the single most important fact in history—the gospel of Christ. Jesus, Son of God, loved us so much that He came to live in a sin-sick world and died a horrible death for sin-sick people. Why? We were created by God and redeemed by Jesus for a purpose: to glorify God. According to the Creator of all life, that is the most important thing. Glorifying God should take first place in our lives

But how do we glorify God? Do we all glorify God in the same way or in different ways? Before we explore the answer, let’s reflect on the concepts we’ve touched on thus far and personalize them.

- 6 Is Christ your personal Savior?

- If so, why do you believe in Him today? In other words, why do you continue to believe in Christ, not why did you become a Christ-follower in the first place? I came to faith in Christ because of a struggle I was going through, but I continue to hope in Him today for very different reasons. Before you answer, pray and reflect on why you remain committed to Jesus, if this is true of you. (Remember,

*Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
1 Corinthians 10:31*

We were created by God and redeemed by Jesus for a purpose: to glorify God.

if you want to keep your thoughts private during small group, you may do so.)

- If you can't answer "Yes," explain why. Try to put in writing why you have not chosen to make Christ your Savior. Be sure to read the addendum, "Choosing Christ," if you have not already done so. The more you think through what you believe and why you believe it, the closer you will come to understanding yourself and your beliefs.

According to Scripture, we were created to bring God glory. But as individuals with free will, we can choose to accept it as our own truth or not. Having seen the truth in God's Word for yourself, will you make a decision to embrace it as your own, starting right now? Check one:

- Yes!
- I'm not there yet; need a little more time to think about it.
- No (Explain).

HOW DO WE GLORIFY GOD?

Let's start with a foundational question: What does it mean to glorify God? The word "glorify" comes from the Greek word *doxazō* and means "to honor, make great or magnify; to show or reveal God's character." Personally, I like the way author Max Lucado explains it: To glorify means "to make a big deal out of God."

So how, then, do we make a big deal out of God, honor and reveal His character? In key ways that are common to all believers (what I call "Shared Purpose") and in other ways that are as varied and unique as there are people ("Specific Purpose").

Shared Purpose refers to God's overall intentions that are common to all believers. As Christians, or followers of Christ, our purpose must be the same as His. If our purposes differ, can we rightly call ourselves followers? Because the Bible sheds light on this topic, we know that our purpose is to glorify Him. (Note: In the next two lessons we will explore four key ways to glorify God.)

To glorify means "to make a big deal out of God."

Shared Purpose refers to God's overall intentions that are common to all believers.

Specific Purpose (or Mission) deals with the unique and specific role you as an individual are to play in God's kingdom on earth.

Shared Purpose:
(Target):
To glorify God



Specific Purpose
(Bull's Eye)
How God created
you as an individual
to glorify Him.

Specific Purpose (or Mission) deals with the unique and specific role you as an individual are to play in God's kingdom on earth. In all likelihood, your Specific Purpose, or Mission, and mine will look very different because God created us very differently in terms of our gifting, interests, experience and personality.

Through *Embracing Purpose*, you will gain fresh insight into our Shared Purpose (glorifying God) and your Specific Purpose (the particular work He has created you to do).

To gain clarity about the journey ahead, think of our Shared Purpose as a Target that we seek to hit. Think of Specific Purpose (or Mission) as the bull's-eye of the target. We can aim for and hit the Bull's-eye when we discover how God created us to glorify Him, based on the unique way He designed us. Through an intentional self-discovery process, *Embracing Purpose* will help you find, once and for all, clear direction for your life. You will never be the same!

SELF-DISCOVERY: IDENTIFYING VALUES

For the purpose of this exercise, let's think of values as the core characteristics or attributes that best describe and define who we are on the inside. These characteristics anchor our lives and signify to us what matters the most.

- Use a pencil and circle up to twenty words or phrases that best illustrate your values. Be sure to add values not found on the list—it is not meant to be comprehensive. Hint: Do not choose words you think you "ought" to value; choose only those words that reflect who you truly are. As you begin, be alert to those values that set you apart as a unique individual.

VALUES LIST

Accomplishment	Choice	Determination
Affirmatio	Collaboration	Diligence
Ambition	Community	Duty
Appreciation	Compassion	Efficienc
Authenticity	Competence	Elegance
Beauty	Competition	Encouragement
Being in control	Consistency with	Enlightenment
Caution	Biblical teaching	Equality
Career	Creativity	Excellence

Faith	Lack of pretense	Respect for the environment
Faithfulness	Love	Responsibility
Family	Making money	Risk taking
Forgiveness	Marriage	Security
Forward-looking	Mentoring	Self-esteem
Freedom	Mercy	Self-expression
Friendship	Movement	Sensitivity
Frugality	Obedience	Servanthood
Fulfillment	Orderliness	Service
Fun	Passion	Sexual fulfillment
Gentleness	Patience	Silence
Genuineness	Peace	Sincerity
Good taste	Perfection	Solitude
Growth	Performance	Spiritual growth
Happiness	Persistence	Stability
Hard work	Personal power	Success
Honesty	Physical vitality	Temperance
Honor	Productivity	Tolerance
Humor	Purity	Tongue control
Impacting people	Quality	Tranquility
Independence	Recognition	Trust
Influence	Relationship	Truth
Integrity	Relaxation	Winning
Joy	Respect for life	Worship
Justice	Respect for people	

ELIMINATING REDUNDANT VALUES

Now, review the values you circled to see if you chose any two or three that are very similar. For example, “authenticity” and “lack of pretense” are related, as are “health” and “physical vitality.” To eliminate those that are similar, complete the following exercise, ensuring that you will have selected values that are different. Chiseling down your list of values to twenty distinct ones is an important step before you begin the final exercise of identifying your core values.

- 8 Note: Do this exercise in pencil. In the space below, list all the values you selected in the Identifying Values exercise, grouping those together that are similar. In each grouping of similar values, place a star by the word or phrase that best describes the value you personally embrace. For example, a portion of your list may look like this:

Authenticity :
/ôthentisitē/ noun.
the quality or condition
of being authentic,
trustworthy, or genuine.

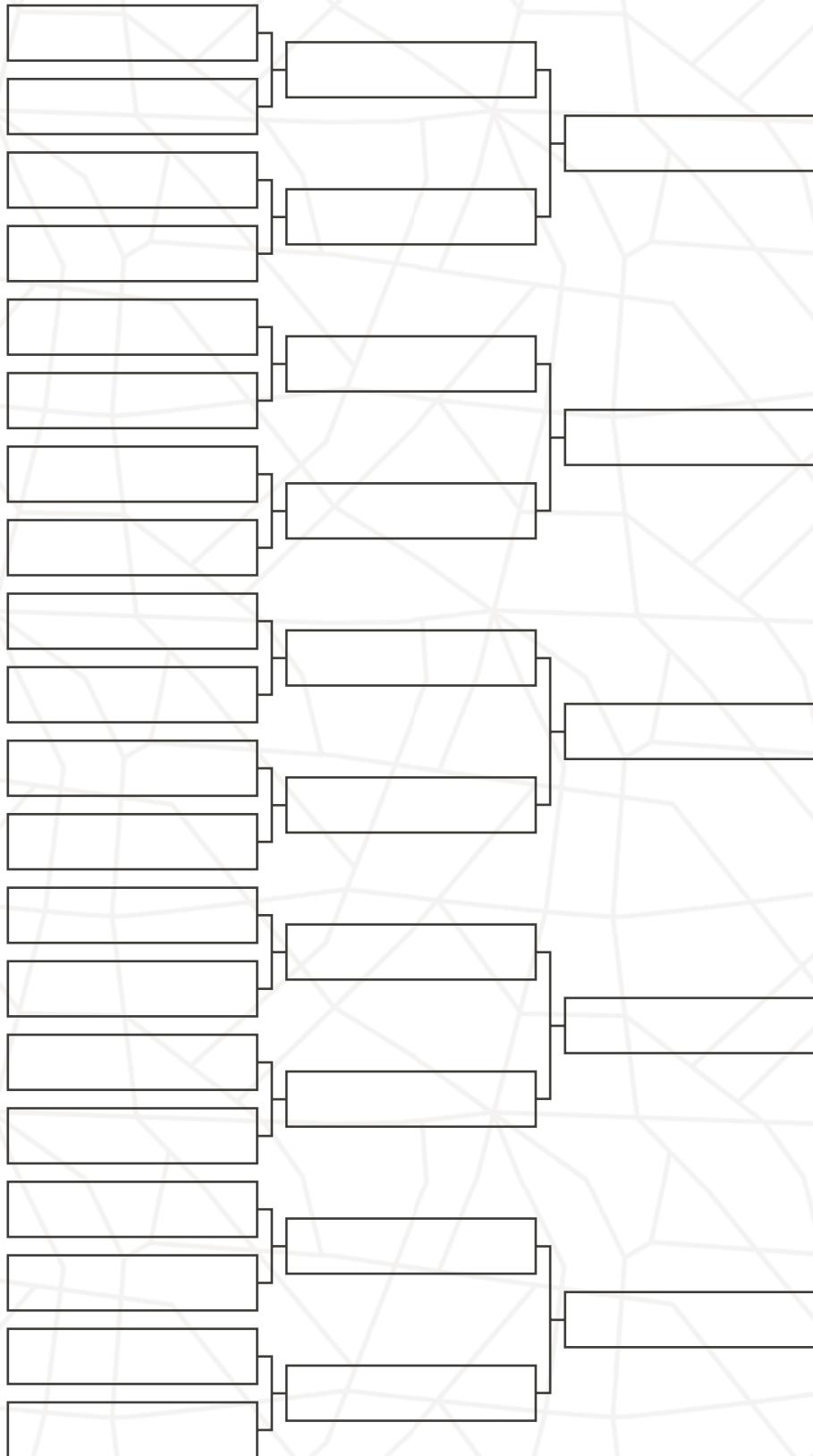
1. *Relationship, family, friends
2. Humor
3. *Authenticity, Genuineness
4. Learning, *Growth

In the “relationship, family and friends” camp, I realize that “relationship” best defines me, so I starred it and erased “family and friends.” Now, having eliminated the redundant ones, count the number of values you have. Do you still have twenty? If not, go back to the values list and select other values until you have twenty in all. The goal of this exercise is to have a list of values that are distinctly different.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.
- 14.
- 15.
- 16.
- 17.
- 18.
- 19.
- 20.

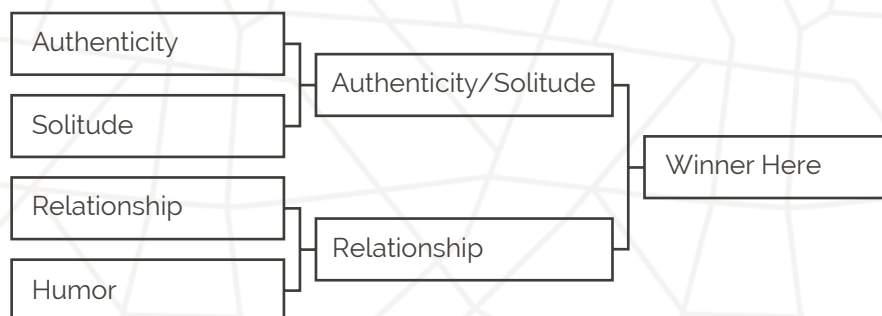
TOURNAMENT OF VALUES

On the Tournament of Values, list your top twenty values in the boxes at the left of the page.



Get ready to discover what you value most by playing the Tournament of Values. Reflect on each pair of values to determine which of the two is most important to you. Note: If both values in a pair are equally important to you, they are “tied.” Bring them both forward to compete in the next round.

For example, let’s say that two of your values are “Authenticity” and “Solitude,” and in your mind they are of equal priority. They then “tie” for that spot and should remain in the tournament. Bring them both forward.



The winner of each pair of values then goes on to compete in the next round with the winner of the other pairs. Play out the rounds until you arrive at your top five core values

9 My Core Values are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

If you engaged in the exercise thoughtfully, it required some serious reflection and extended time. Now you will examine your results to determine just how accurately they describe the real you.

YOUR VERY ESSENCE

Your core values should reflect who you are at your core. If you walked into a crowded room, would friends be able to call you by the values you've chosen instead of your name? Would they say that your values reflect accurately the real you: "Here comes Sincerity. Here comes Influence." Or, "Here comes Donna, whose very essence is Sincerity/Influence." Test each value in the sentence below.

Here comes _____ whose very essence is _____.
(your name) (value)

Does each word seem to fit you? If not, you may want to rethink the values you have chosen by working through the identifying values exercise again.

A WORD TO THE WISE

Because you may not have thought much about your core values up to this point, replacing your name with them may not seem to work. However, the exercise itself may help to alleviate the apparent "misfit" in time. Right now, you may feel that there are inconsistencies between what you claim to value and how you are perceived by others and even by yourself. The fact is, many of us live our lives without any thought as to what actually motivates us.

Dedicated, careful thought and prayer for discernment as to what you truly do value deep within your soul will guide you as you work through these exercises. Identifying your top values will help you live more consistently with your true identity. The exercises force you to become aware of what you think and who you are. That knowledge alone will begin pulling you toward your values.

Gary Collins, in his book *Christian Coaching*, says this about the importance of knowing one's values:

By their very nature, values energize us. We are drawn to them because we find such fulfillment when we live and work in accordance with them. By knowing our values, we have a better ability to answer tough questions like—Who am I? Why am I here? How do I want to live? What kind of person do I want to be? Clear values tend to move us in the right direction.¹

Identifying your top values will help you live more consistently with your true identity.

¹Gary Collins, *Christian Coaching* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2001), 98.

- 10 Write your core values below. Beside each one, explain why that value is “core” for you.

1. because

2. because

3. because

4. because

5. because

- 11 To help you easily remember your core values, use the first letter of each one, making an acronym by scrambling them. You may want to choose a synonym for one or two of your values, if needed, to make an intelligible acronym.

For example: A friend’s core values are...

Trust
Respect
Authenticity
Sincerity
Humor

Her acronym is...TRASH. Yes, really. It reflects her humor and is easy to remember!

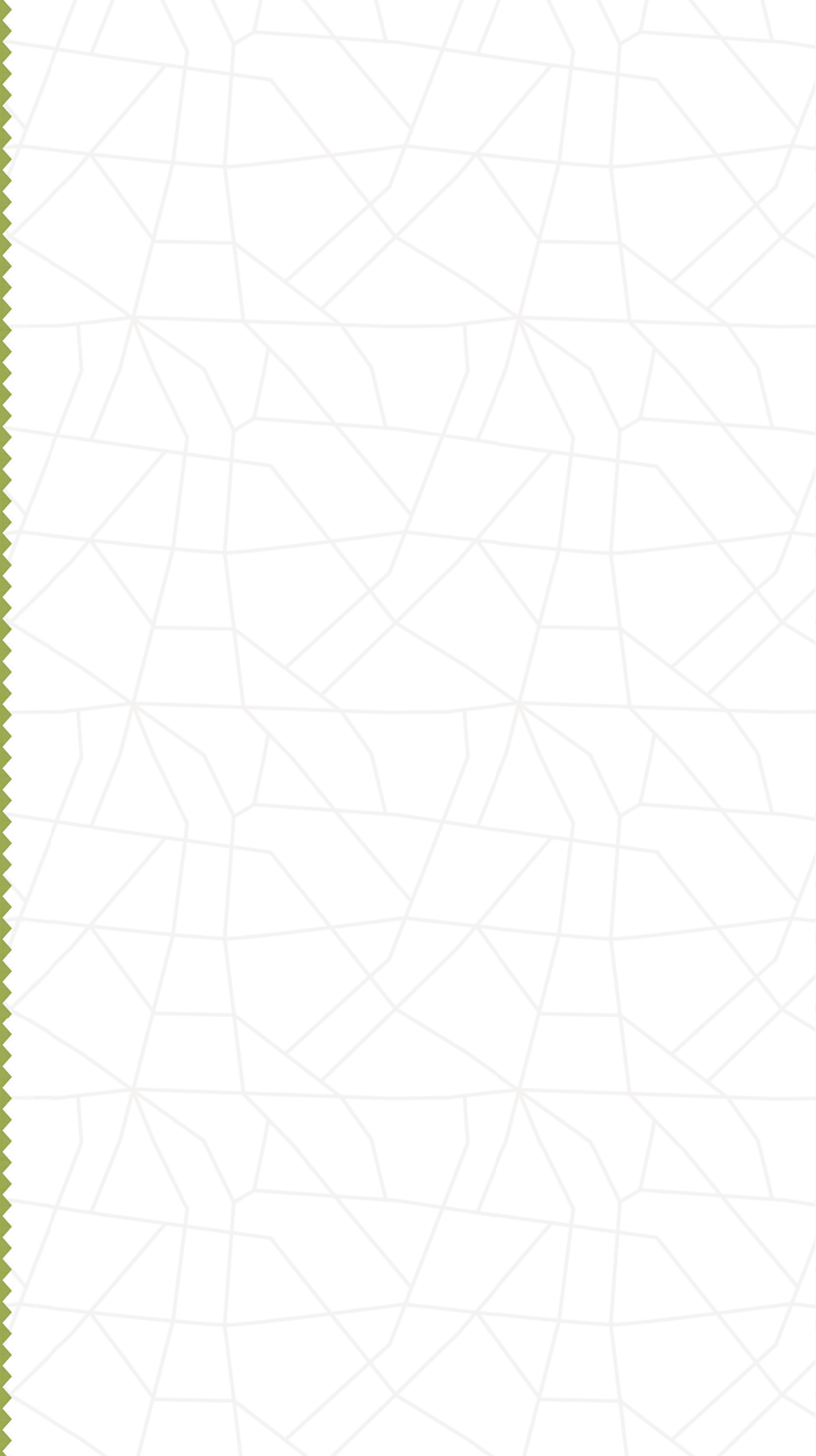
Have fun with this exercise; see how creative you can be! Scribble in the margin.

- 12 What is your acronym?

SUMMING UP

- “You are not your own...for you have been bought with a price.”
If we’re Christ-followers, God’s purposes are our own.
- We were created and redeemed for a purpose: To glorify God.
- Shared Purpose refers to God’s overall intentions that are common to all believers. A Target represents Shared Purpose, something we can aim for as we live our lives more purposefully.
- Specific Purpose/Mission reflects the unique and specific role you as an individual are to play in God’s kingdom on earth. A Bull’s-eye, the center point of the Target, represents your Specific Purpose/Mission.

Synonym:
/sinənim/ noun.
a word having the same or nearly the same meaning as another word.



LESSON TWO VIDEO MESSAGE NOTES

Created for a Purpose: Blocked by Energy Drainers

Shared Purpose: to _____ God, common to all Christ-followers; determined by God.

Specific Purpose: unique to each individual; to be determined by _____ with God's help.

TWO KINDS OF ENERGY DRAINERS (ROADBLOCKS)

- Physical _____ – too much _____
- _____ Clutter – too many _____ -es.

Why do we say YES so often?

We lack clear _____ & firm _____.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	I.	II.
Not Important	III.	IV.

Time Management Matrix~Stephen Covey's *First Things First*

What is not fully _____ cannot be freely _____.