

*“God called me BEFORE I was born, while I was still in my mother’s womb, he named me.”* Let’s think about what that means, not just for Isaiah, but for us! Often we wander through life just keeping busy, without any thought about whether or not we are being all we can be. And there are other times in our lives when we spend a lot of energy and time trying to focus on the purpose or value for our lives. It happens when high school seniors are trying to figure out where to go to college or what trade to follow. As we get older, we look back and wonder if we have made the right choices, and whether or not our chosen path in life is the right one for us. And when a job is lost, or retirement looms, another time of wrestling takes place as we wonder how much worth there is to our lives and whether or not anyone has need of our gifts.

How often have each of you wrestled with your purpose in life? Is this a regular exercise or only a response to crisis? Just where does one begin? As we think about discovering our purpose, realize that discover means to uncover –to find what has been hidden – to reveal what hasn’t yet seen the light of day ... to embrace what already is. And, if something is, it has a reason or purpose, whether as tiny as an atom or neutron or as massive as the sun. If it is there is a purpose! The first step in discovering its purpose is to confess its origin.

For instance, one might have a beautiful or powerful voice. That voice could intimidate or share love. It could bring fear, or it could bring comfort. It could be a source of strength or the agent of destruction. How one uses that voice is determined by the understanding of its purpose. Before one uses the gift of such a voice, one must understand how that voice is best used.

Christians believe God created each of us with unique gifts, which means my Purpose is tied up in God. Think, for instance, about St. Paul. He was extremely gifted! He was a Roman citizen and a Jew. He memorized the Hebrew Bible and was schooled in the best of Greek traditions. He was intelligent. He was gifted. But initially failing to understand his purpose, his gifts initially were used to persecute the first Christians. But when he allowed God’s purpose to breathe into his life, his actions changed. Paul’s gifts didn’t improve but were used in a new way as he was controlled by differed purpose (LOVE)

Isaiah "found" his purpose and believed it was something God had prepared him for before he was born. His uniqueness, tied to God, made his purpose clear. With God confessed as center of his life; the gifts, talents, and opportunities that made him unique were given purpose by how they were used.

Purpose can be intimidating, but this is what it means to be *“called out of darkness into the Light.”* Like fireflies that simply glow, our gifts change a dark world as they are filled with Christ’s light. When we do what we are gifted to do, God helps every step of the way. His power, not mine, is what gives us Light. And so, whether as a parent or a spouse, a child or a student, a worker or a teacher, a grandparent or a mechanic, if my life is filled with God’s love, then my gifts have the potential of sharing that love and creative power as they are given in blessing and response to the love that has made me so unique.

Discovering my purpose is simply having faith that God’s creation has a purpose! That is how shepherds, and wise men from the East, and fishermen from Galilee (all with vastly different

talents, opportunities, and gifts) wound up with the same purpose – they just had different strategies and techniques! And so it is with you and me.

We are all familiar with “smart” lights” that turn on only when needed (like “dusk to dawn” lights.) I remember when I lived in Miami and suddenly one of those powerful summer storms darkened the sky and poured torrents of rain, it took so long for those “smart” lights to turn on, that by the time they did, the storm was over and the sun had returned. So you see, smart lights are a great concept, but they are not always available when needed. (That is no different than me deciding my cleverness or strength will be enough to give purpose to living ... for often it isn't. And when God isn't part of my daily living, sometimes it takes time to get back into that comfortable relationship of powerful love.)

On the other hand, consider the new concept of “dumb lights” on automobiles that never go off. Someone figured out that headlights not only are needed so that I can see, but so that others can see me. The power is always there whether we think about it or not ... and so it is with faith! These new headlights are more like discipleship. They are used all the time, whether we understand or anticipate their need. They are gifts that never stop giving. They always are used for their purpose. They are always shining ready for any darkness or any need.

Discovering my purpose (in reality) is nothing more or less than answering the call to discipleship. Will we turn on ONLY when we decide it is dark and think we have strength or resolve? Or will we always be shining because that is who we are, and why would we want to have anything to do w/darkness? If I can write, or speak, or play an instrument, or build a house, or love a child, do you not see how God's creative energy gives ultimate purpose to any of those gifts? There should be no surprise for any of us in “discovering” purpose ... it is more a matter of faith and commitment to the God who has given so much for me!

*M. Scott Peck was not even a Christian when he wrote *The Road Less Traveled*, yet he tells of friends of his saying to him once, "Scotty, it was so clever of you the way you disguised your Christianity in *The Road Less Traveled* in order to get the Christian message across to people." Peck replied, "Well, I didn't disguise my Christianity. I wasn't a Christian." Peck became a Christian, however, and this is how he describes this component of his calling:*

*"One of the inner events of my journey occurred when I read C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*, a novel composed of letters of advice from Screwtape, a senior demon, to his nephew, Wormwood, whose task is to undermine the spiritual life of a young man. At one point, Screwtape advises Wormwood to make sure that the man, now a young Christian due to their combined bungling, to regard "his time as "his" time." This sentence, at first, made no sense to me. I read it three times. I wondered whether there might not be some typographical error. How else could anybody think of his time except as his own?*

*Then it dawned on me that the possibility existed of my time belonging to a power higher than myself. For a good while, it was a most discomforting notion, and still today I am continuing to learn to submit my time to God's ownership. It wasn't until a dozen years later, however, that I actually submitted to being baptized as a Christian." [M. Scott Peck, *Further Along the Road Less Traveled: The Unending Journey Toward Spiritual Growth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 157.]*

Never forget, God chose you even before he created you. What that means is that his love was ready for you and your gifts were created by Him. He is your purpose and promises to empower every moment of your life.

We all have different opportunities and not all of our gifts are always able to be fully understood or used. However, if we live by faith, His light will glow in you!

The only question left is whether we will be a light that is only “dusk to dawn” or one that is “always on?” May God help you always shine like the Son. Amen.