

PLANNED FOR GOD'S PLEASURE
Romans 12:1-2

Purpose Driven Life Lenten Series
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As we continue this series called, "40 Days Of Purpose," today we're going to look at the first of God's five purposes for your life. Revelation 4:11b says, "*for you (God) created all things; and by your will (for your pleasure—NLT) they were created.*" The Bible says that you were created for God's will, for his enjoyment, for his purpose.

How many of you are parents? How many enjoy watching your kids? Most of the time! And I believe the same thing is also true with God, that most of the time he enjoys watching you be you. God smiled when you were born because he created you to enjoy you.

Now last week we talked about how you were created to be loved by God. This week we're looking at the flip side which is God wants you to love him back. One day a person asked Jesus, "*What is the most important command in the Bible?*" And Jesus replied in Matthew 22, "*Love the Lord your God. This is the first and greatest commandment.*"

Now there is a word for this, my friends, it is the word "worship." And yet the problem is that worship is often misunderstood by people today. When I say the word "worship" what do you think of? Well, you may think of prayer, singing, liturgies and rituals.

And yet worship is far more than that. Please note: My first purpose in life is to worship God. It is your highest priority. It is your number one purpose. So we're going to focus today on exactly what this means since, as I said, worship is misunderstood by so many people.

Please read with me Romans 12:1, "*Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—for this is your spiritual act of worship.*" Now I'm not going to go into great detail on this verse and yet I want to point out two things.

Worship is my response to God's love. Notice it says that in view, or because of God's great mercy, we worship him back. You see, God takes the initiative. God always makes the first move. This is one of the central focuses of Lutheran teachings and of Martin Luther, the fact that God always makes the first move. God creates us, saves us, forgives us, blesses us, protects us. And because of these things we worship.

The second thing this passage tells us is that worship is giving back to God. He gives to us, by his grace, and we give back to him. Whenever you offer anything to God, that's called worship; and that brings pleasure to God. When your children are grateful to you as parents, that brings you pleasure. And when we are grateful to our heavenly Father, that brings him pleasure.

And yet the question is what am I supposed to offer? What do you give a God who has everything? Mark 12:30 says, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, all your mind and all your strength.*" This is a good verse for you to memorize this week.

The message is that God wants you and me to love him three ways. First, God wants you to love him thoughtfully. It says *“love him with your mind.”* In other words, he wants you to not just go through the motions or to just sing and say lots of words without thinking.

Secondly, God wants you and I to love him passionately. He says *“with all your heart and soul.”* And thirdly, he wants you and I to love him practically. God says *“love me with all your strength,”* with all your abilities. In other words, he doesn’t have your attention, your affection, your ability unless you give them to him. And that’s when you have the heart of worship.

Now it is important to remember that worship is focusing on God. It is focusing my mind, my thoughts, my attention on God. You know in a lot of religions the idea of worship is to put your mind into neutral, to tune out and enter another zone. And yet the truth is that God wants you to worship him thoughtfully. It takes energy and focus.

It is not simply going through the motions, but really thinking about it. Have you ever prayed on autopilot? You pray before a meal or in worship, and yet if someone asked you what you just prayed, you have no idea. Do you ever zone out in church—not when I’m preaching, of course?

God wants you to focus on him because he is focused on you. Psalm 139:1-2 says, *“O Lord you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.”* The reality is that God pays constant attention to you, he never stops thinking about you. His love for you is eternal. And so he calls you to focus on him.

Now how do I do that? Well, first of all you can do that by establishing a daily time with God; just a few minutes during the day. Talk to him, read his Word, listen to Christian music. In the Old Testament, the only place you could worship God was in the Temple. That, however, is not true anymore. God has set us free to be able to worship him anywhere through his Holy Spirit.

You can worship in your car on the way to work, in your office before a meeting, in the backyard as you are mowing your lawn, in your bedroom as you go to bed. Just simply talk with God. No ceremony or fancy words are needed. Just be yourself and enjoy being in his presence.

You can also develop a constant conversation with God. Psalm 105:4 says, *“Worship him continually.”* Just think about him throughout the day. I know of someone who prays and talks to God throughout his commute to work each day. Another person I know offers little petitions throughout the day for friends, in meetings, simply saying, “Lord, Hear my prayer.”

It is amazing, my friends, but when you focus on yourself the inevitable results are thoughts of worry, insecurity, anxiety, guilt, fear, discouragement. And yet when the focus shifts from me to God, all of a sudden you begin to sense gratitude, hope, confidence and love.

Now not only is worship focusing my attention on God, it is also secondly expressing my affection to God. This of course is loving God with all your heart and soul. Now this is often difficult for those of us of Germanic and Scandinavian heritage who have a difficult time even telling our spouses and children we love them.

Remember how the Bible says, *“We love because he first loved us.”* You know, in many religions God is this angry tyrant whom you have to appease or be afraid of. But that is not the real God. The

Bible says that God wants to be loved. He doesn't want our sacrifices, our rituals, our lofty words. He simply wants to be loved by you.

Just think if I said to my wife, Kim, on our anniversary, "Here are some flowers. Husbands are supposed to be nice and give gifts on an anniversary. So I've fulfilled my duty and here they are." Wouldn't she be thrilled? No, she wants me to love her passionately, not out of duty.

And the same thing is true of God. He doesn't want, "Oh, I better go to worship today." God doesn't want duty. He doesn't want ritual, religion, rules or regulations. He isn't impressed by the kind of music or our flowery words. He simply wants you to know him. He wants you to have a relationship with him. And he wants you to passionately love him.

So how do I express affection to God? Well, start by saying thanks. Start by looking around, noticing all of God's blessings, and saying thanks to God. "God thank you for the beautiful skies, the green trees." Thanks for my family and friends, for forgiveness and salvation.

Singing is also a wonderful way to worship God. Sing along to Christian radio or CD's of great worship songs, or remember and sing favorite hymns. Singing, even the most simple words and melodies, can fill your heart with love to God.

And, of course, the greatest way to express affection to God is by giving your life to him. At a wedding two people stand and give their lives to each other saying, "I do." That's the essence of love. And in the same way we are to say to God, "I give you my heart, my soul. I want you to take my life." And we do this because he first committed his love to us.

The third and final thing about worship is that it is using my abilities for God. It is loving God with all your strength. You see, God wants us to love him with our minds, with our hearts, and he wants us to serve him with our strength. These, of course, are practical expressions of love.

What this means is that it doesn't matter what you do as much as who you do it for. You give your whole life to God. And in that, all your work can be turned into worship. You can be a carpet cleaner, a nurse, an at-home mom, or a truck driver. It doesn't matter what you do, but rather who you do it for. Your job, your life, everything can be turned into an act of worship.

Just think if you decided today, "God, tomorrow morning I'm going to work with a new boss. I'm going to do my work for you." Just think of how everything you do, and every person you work with, will take on a new purpose. God wants your whole life to become an act of worship. It is where faith and worship become real.

In summary, my friends, the greatest mistake you can make in life is to miss your primary purpose. So what do you think about the most each day? Whatever that is, that is what you are worshipping. And the way you spend your time and money often shows what you love the most.

The Bible says you were planned for God's pleasure. You were made to know and love God. So I challenge you today to make God number one in you and to live a life of worship in all you do. For that is what brings great joy and pleasure to God.