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GOD'S GLOBAL PURPOSE

(I am again starting my newsletter by quoting from David Platt's book, Radical.)

Ezekiel 36 contains some startling words from God describing the reason for what he did among them. *It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations. I will show the holiness of my great name. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I show my self holy through you before their eyes.*

What a statement! God goes so far as to say that when he acts among his people, he doesn't show his grace, mercy and justice for their sake but for the sake of his own holy name. In the New Testament Jesus ended his time on earth by commanding his followers to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. In the last book of the Bible we see the culmination of God's purpose.

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

In the beginning of earthly history, God's purpose was to bless his people so that all peoples would glorify him for his salvation. Now, at the end, God's purpose is fulfilled. This is the final, ultimate, all-consuming, glorious, overwhelmingly global purpose of God in Scripture. It is the great "Why?" of God. But if you were to ask the average Christian sitting in church on Sunday morning to summarize the message of Christianity, you would likely hear something like "The message of Christianity is that God loves me." Or, "The message of Christianity is that God loves me enough to send his Son, Jesus, to die for me." That sounds wonderful, but is it biblical? "God loves me" is not the essence of biblical Christianity. Because if that is the message of Christianity, then who is the object of Christianity? Me.

God loves me. Me. Christianity's object is me. Therefore, when I look for a church; I look for the music and the programs that best cater to me and my family. When I make plans for my life and career, when I consider the house I will live in, the car I will drive, the way I live, I will choose according to what is best for me. This is the version of Christianity that largely prevails in our culture. But it is not biblical Christianity. The message of biblical Christianity is not "God loves me, period," as if we were the object of our own faith. The message is "God loves me so that I might make him - his ways, his salvation, his glory, and his greatness - known among all nations." Now God is the object of our faith, and Christianity centers around him. We are not the end of the gospel; God is. We are not at the center of the universe. God is.

It's a foundational truth: God creates, blesses, and saves each of us for a radically global purpose: to bring glory to Himself. Jesus' great commission was, "**Go and make disciples of all the nations.**" But we have erected lines of defense against the global purpose God has for our lives. Many say, "Well, not everyone is called to foreign missions," or "I am not called to foreign missions." We see foreign missions as an optional program in the church for a faithful few who apparently are called to it. The rest of us may watch the missions slide shows when the missionaries come home, but God has not called us to do that missions thing. But where in the Bible is missions ever identified as an optional program in the church? We have taken Jesus' command and reduced it to a calling for a few special people.

We don't do this with other words from Jesus. When He said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest," we say, "That means me!" We take Jesus' promise in John 10:10 that He will give us eternal, abundant life, and we say, "That means me." But when the resurrected Christ's final words to His church were, "Go and make disciples of all nations," we say, "That means other people." We have assigned the obligations of Christianity to a few while keeping the privileges of Christianity for us all. Now, each of us has different gifts, skills, passions, and callings from God. This was also true of the first disciples. But each follower of Christ in the New Testament was intended to take up the mantle of proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth. That is the reason he gave each of them his Spirit and gave them

all the same plan: make disciples of all nations.

It is the same today. When I sit down for lunch with Steve, a businessman in our church, it is obvious we have different callings in our lives. He is an accountant; I am a pastor. He is gifted with numbers; I can't stand numbers. But we both understand that God has called us and gifted us for a global purpose. So Steve is constantly asking, "How can I lead my life, my family and my accounting firm for God's glory in Birmingham and around the world?" He is leading co-workers to Christ; he is mobilizing accountants to serve the poor; and his life is personally impacting individuals and churches in Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe with the gospel. Steve is not going to sit on the side-lines. He is convinced that God has created him to make his glory known in all nations, and he is committing his life to accomplishing that purpose.

The most common response that arises among Christians to all of this is, "What about the needs here? Why do we need to be involved in other nations when there are so many needs in our nation?" Some say, "I don't need to go to other nations because God has given me a heart for the United States," or "God has given me a heart for Birmingham." These statements sound spiritual, but I think they are smoke screens....because most of us really are not very concerned about the needs right around us. Most Christians rarely share the gospel, and most Christians' schedules are not weighted to feeding the hungry, helping the sick, and reaching out to the neediest places in our country.

But even if we were doing these things, we would still be overlooking a foundational biblical truth: God's heart is for the world. When we say we have a heart for the United States, we are admitting that we have a meager 5 percent of God's heart, and we are proud of it. It is not a question of here or there, but both here and there.

Each of us has to make a decision: God's dream or the American dream. Imagine a gifted businessman: humble beginnings, hard work, daunting challenges, marriage, children, perseverance, success, a big home, a luxurious retirement, ocean cruises, golf, security, pleasures. A question: "Weren't we created for something much greater than this?" Let me introduce you to Daniel, a college student who is a member of our faith family and a recent honor graduate in mechanical engineering. Coming out of school, he was given two offers: an extremely high-paying job at a nuclear power plant, or have all his expenses paid to complete masters and doctorate degrees in engineering. Two years ago Daniel came to faith in Christ. The focus of his life shifted from what would be best for Daniel to how could he best bring glory to God. So he turned down both options and went to work with an engineering program designed to help impoverished communities around the world. His dad e-mailed me that he was proud that his son had let go of the pursuits of this world in order to pursue a higher calling. God has been faithful to Daniel. He recently told me about unprecedented opportunities that God is now giving him from America to Africa to Asia as he pursues a greater dream.

Let me introduce you to Jeff, a wonderfully successful businessman in our church who went on a short mission trip that changed his life: "I stood in a city dump in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and saw men, women, and children who lived there and were scouring for food. In the middle of that scene, God asked me, 'What are you going to do with what I have given you?'" He still runs his business, but he and two others guys have begun a ministry that works with local churches around the world to provide clean water in communities where thousands are dying every day of preventable diseases.

And let me introduce you to Ed and Patty. Now in their early seventies, they had many options in their retirement. But they chose an uncommon path. This year, between July and October, Ed and Patty were home a total of only eleven days. They were doing disaster relief in cities and towns that had experienced flooding in the U.S. They both went to Nigeria, and Ed went to Sri Lanka, where he cooked meals for the hungry in the middle of rebel fighting. Patty didn't go with him because she doesn't like sleeping under trucks in the middle of a civil war. Ed said, "What else am I going to do with my retirement? I want to tell as many people about the gospel as I can."

There is nothing extraordinary about Daniel, Jeff, Ed, and Patty. They simply believe they were created for more than a Christian spin on the American dream. They believe the purpose of their lives is deeper than having a nice job, raising a decent family, living a comfortable life, and tacking church attendance on the end of it. They believe Jesus has called them to a higher plan and a greater dream, that he might use them to accomplish the glorious, global, God-exalting purpose that has been primary since the beginning of time, and they don't want to settle for anything less than radical abandonment to that purpose.

And God has a great and glorious plan for each of our lives. Let's find out what it is!

MENTAL ILLNESS

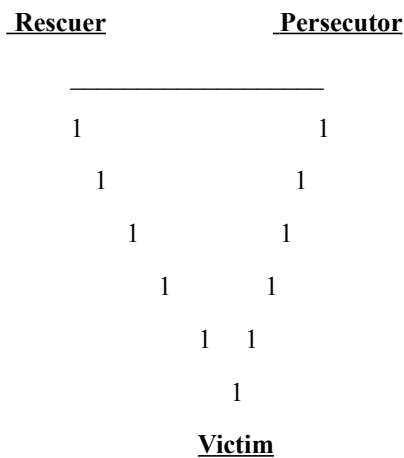
Technically speaking, the church is involved in "ministry" or "prayer ministry" rather than in "counseling." In some states, but not in Colorado, you have to be careful about these terms because the state has legally defined "counseling" as something only a state certified counselor is qualified to do, and if a pastor or church member uses the term "counseling" he makes himself and the church liable to litigation.

Parts of the church are closed and opposed to the type ministry I do because they perceive it as psychology or psychiatry. Psychiatrists are opposed to this ministry because they believe that people who talk to God are psychotic. Both psychiatrists and parts of the church believe that people who cast out demons are fanatics and/or psychotic. (No matter what you believe, some people in the church and outside the church will think you are a heretic or a nut-case. Right? If you don't agree with me, I suspect you are a little unbalanced.) The term "mental illness" itself was rejected by the church for many years because it seemed to be antithetical to the biblical description of sin and salvation. (Was that man of Gadera who was living among the tombs and cutting himself mentally ill? Or was he full of demons? How would our society have tried to heal him? How would your church attempt to heal him?)

Mental health professionals are involved in trying to bring healing to people's souls (their minds and emotions), and their insights, except when they contradict God's truths, can be very helpful to people. There are Christian psychologists, such as Dr. James Dobson, who obviously do not see the two perspectives on healing as being antithetical.

A Licensed Professional Counselor, Dale Wright, is on the staff of our church part-time, and he leads and trains our Soul Care ministry. Dale is, of course, a deeply committed Christian. Dale recently shared some insights at a meeting of our Ministry Team (our Ministry Team primarily ministers to folks who come to the altar following worship services). I don't have space here for all the great insights that Dale shared with us, but following is one of the tools he left with us titled the **DRAMA TRIANGLE**:

The Drama Triangle is an excellent tool for conceptualizing dysfunctional relationships. It was first described many decades ago. Participation in this Drama Triangle keeps people disconnected from Godly relationships and holds them in bondage to blame, guilt, shame, and unforgiveness. The relationships defined in the triangle are not perpetuated at a conscious level, and were most likely learned from our families.



It takes at least two people to play in this triangle, but there may be dozens involved. Many people come to counseling playing the role of **victim**. They see themselves as helpless against outside forces or people who are playing the role of persecutor. Their behaviors are based on fear, and they allow things to occur so that they will feel safe and can avoid responsibility. They expect others to meet their needs and hold resentment when their needs are unmet.

The **persecutor** behaves in a reactionary manner as well and controls others as a way to feel safe. He deals with stress or new ideas with criticism, blame and even physical attacks. He must be in control at all costs to avoid responsibility and fear. Persecutors are often self-righteous and judgmental.

The **rescuer** uses dominance, as well, to feel safe and to avoid his own problems. He sees himself as morally superior and must help others in order to feel good. Rescuers gravitate toward caretaker rolls and often feel underappreciated and resentful toward others.

To illustrate this, a couple recently came to me for marital counseling. The purpose of counseling was to help Debbie, who was feeling overwhelmed and depressed. Her husband, Mike, made the appointment without her knowledge. Mike was the rescuer at this point, but moved into the persecutor role when he immediately described his wife as lazy and weak. Debbie quickly assumed the victim role and began crying at his criticisms. Mike, of course, became angry and expected me to "fix" her. He wanted me to play in the Drama Triangle as the rescuer. Debbie continued to cry and invited me to play the rescuer by dramatically yelling, "Tell me what I'm supposed to do, he's driving me crazy!"

These types of relationships are common. The Drama Triangle can help you get a better picture of what is happening and how to intervene or, in some cases, how not to intervene. This is only a very brief overview. If you find this model helpful, more information is available online in articles and books.

MY GOLF GAME

You may be surprised to learn that I still play golf regularly, although it looks more like croquet than golf. I've been having a lot of problems with my feet, legs, knees, and hips, so I don't know how much longer this is going to last. When possible, I play with my friend Howie once a week. Howie is an older man, eighty five and a half, and I am only eighty four and a half. I tell him that I hope I can still play golf when I get to his age. We play only nine holes, and we follow the pga rules (not the P.G.A. rules). The pga is the "pathetic golf association". These are some of our rules:

- The H.T.Y.H. rule on tee No. 1. (Hit till you're happy)
- Only one more gimme (free shot off the tee) on the next eight holes, unless you really need an extra one.
- Perpetual winter rules, which means that you can improve your lie in the fairway or rough (it is always winter somewhere).
- The maximum rule. Three shots over par is the maximum score on any one hole.
- The gimme rule. We pick up short putts ("short" is a subjective term) on the basis that there is no glory in making short putts and great shame in missing them.
- Yellow ropes, which to the P.G.A. signify out of bounds, to the pga signify nothing.
- The free kick rule. If the ball rolls in the weeds, we get one free kick to get it back to the fairway.

I must admit that Howie and I are excellent golfers. We both shoot around 50. We play at the course in Fruita with the spectacular monoliths and rock formations of the Colorado National Monument as a backdrop. And we are so grateful to the Lord that He has given us the ability to continue to do this for a while more.

OBEDIENCE EQUALS LOVE

My friend Ryan recently forwarded me a great devotional that I want to share with you: Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me." (John 14:23-24)

Jesus equated obedience with love. Let's not deceive ourselves: it's critically important to obey God. David was tenacious, determined and sincerely devoted to following hard after God's commands. This desire chiseled and shaped his heart over many years. But he was far from a model of obedience. There was often a yawning gap between his resolve and his actions. In other words, he blew it from time to time, sometimes in spades. Yet he was still a man after God's own heart. What does this tell us? That there is more to being a person after God's heart than obedience. There is also the posture of your heart before God. God counted the sincere intentions of David's heart even when his great weakness led him to wrong decisions. God sees us the same way. Our sincere intentions to obey are very significant to God. He notices our desires, not just our outward actions.

A sincere determination to love Jesus even in the midst of your weakness is a huge part of being a man.

God Bless,

Glenn

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