

## When You're Dissatisfied With Your Purpose

By **Christine Hoover** (April 17, 2019)

I am a "purpose" person and always have been. I remember as a teenager reading about spiritual gifts and the design of the body recorded in 1 Corinthians 12 and feeling a sense of joy washing over me. If this is true, I thought, this means each person is designed by God for a purpose and, when found in Christ, gifted with supernatural abilities in order to fulfill that purpose. How incredible to consider!

I still find it terribly exciting that every single one of us is vital to the work of God in this world and in his church. Even more wondrous to me, the Holy Spirit initiates the specific work God has planned for us, empowers us to do it and then brings fruit from our work. Who are we that God would allow us to cooperate in his kingdom work?

So, yes, I'm a purpose person. I've enjoyed discovering how God has gifted me, and I enjoy helping others know and walk in their gifts.

However, in this passionate pursuit of mine to serve and work according to my gifts, I've continually experienced bouts of dissatisfaction, frustration, uncertainty and fruitlessness. Even recently I've found myself reconsidering just about everything I thought I knew about myself and my place in God's work. Because the ground underneath me is constantly shifting, and I feel a sense of restlessness, as if I'm trying to grab onto something for stability that keeps moving just out of my reach.

That language sounds familiar, doesn't it? The writer of Ecclesiastes describes our human pursuits carried out in human wisdom as an attempt to grasp vapor in our hands—it's foolish and futile. The writer has come to this conclusion after methodically testing various human pursuits and finding himself, in the end, empty and restless.

He tells us repeatedly that human pursuits carried out in human wisdom lead to our dissatisfaction. I've lived long enough now that I can see how this is true in the pursuit of wanton sex, money, self-indulgence and worldly glory. But I struggle to see so clearly when it comes to serving God, to doing what's right and good for him, because I so often want to use my purpose and gifts in ways they weren't made to be used.

*Even godly pursuits carried out in human wisdom lead to our dissatisfaction.*

What is human wisdom? This is wisdom birthed from the self—what we can understand, see, create and devise. This is also wisdom focused on self. Human wisdom always seeks its own reputation, honor and glory, believing we're completely self-made people. Human wisdom tells us we can figure out what God is doing from beginning to end and that we, in self-agency, can set our own agenda for how we'll use the skills we have.

When we layer our Christian lives and service with human wisdom, we find ourselves grasping for vapor. We won't find satisfaction in our labor, and we'll be endlessly frustrated when we view our lives, limits and opportunities in light of the lives of others. In our human wisdom, we bristle, believing God withholds good from us personally and is limited in his long-term vision.

So I'm learning to interrogate my dissatisfaction.

The bouts of dissatisfaction I feel are often, if not always, from my attempts at replicating through my own wisdom and efforts what only God can do. Only God can make my service and work purposeful and significant. Only God can give satisfaction and peace. *Satisfaction in my service is a gift, not something I can attain or earn.*

The writer of Ecclesiastes, after noting his unhappiness and even despair that's resulted from his pursuits through human wisdom, says, "There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find *enjoyment* in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and *joy*" (Eccl. 2:24–25).

Who can eat? I can.

Who can work? I can.

Who can know joy in these everyday tasks? I can, but only when I do what I do for God, with God and depending on God. The joy is a gift God gives in my union with him.

As the writer of Ecclesiastes says, "There is nothing better." We can't improve on God's wisdom with our own: We'll only find purpose and satisfaction in our godly pursuits when suiting ourselves is not the end goal.

Our gifts aren't from or for us.

We find life when we live it for God and for the benefit of others.