

TOOL #3: BUILDING

EPHESIANS 2:10

How important is it to know your real purpose in life? One of the saddest stories involving an American celebrity is that of Elvis Presley. Twenty-five years after his death, an album of his greatest hits ended up being the number one record in the nation. Enormously successful. Adored and loved by millions of fans. But Elvis died unfulfilled and unhappy. In an interview with his ex-wife, Priscilla, she made an interesting observation about her former husband. “Elvis never came to terms with who he was meant to be or what his purpose in life was. He thought he was here for a reason, maybe to preach, maybe to serve, maybe to save, maybe to care for people. That agonizing desire was always with him and he knew he wasn’t fulfilling it. So he’d go on stage and he wouldn’t have to think about it.” Elvis Presley never got a handle on why he was here. Lack of a defining purpose destroyed his life. At the end of the day, drug use isn’t really what ruined Elvis’ life. Drugs, alcohol or materialism are never the real problems in anyone’s life. Instead, it’s ignorance about why God brought you into this world or a stubborn unwillingness to fulfill the purpose that you know full well God created you for. Either way, failure to discover God’s purpose or failure to live out God’s purpose for you will destroy you.

That’s just as true for churches as it is for individuals. If a church doesn’t know why it exists or it refuses to fulfill the purpose God designed for it, it will die eventually and it should die. We’ve been focusing on that idea of purpose over the last month as we’ve considered our church’s new mission and vision statements. We’ve called this message series “Mission Possible.” Let’s recite our mission statement together as a way of reminding us of it and reinforcing its message. ““We seek to glorify God by building a family of believers passionate about Him where people are loved the way they are, urged to become more like Christ and equipped to share Christ in word and deed.”

“We seek to glorify God by building a family of believers passionate about Him...” That’s our target: the glory of God. Right there is the ultimate purpose of why Karl Road Baptist Church exists: God’s glory. “...where people are loved the way they are...” That’s the first tool of three that will help us bring glory to God. We call it “belonging.” “...urged to become more like Christ...” That’s the second tool that will help us bring glory to God. We call it “becoming.” Today’s message focuses on the last phrase: “... equipped to share Christ in word and deed.” That’s the third tool that will help us bring glory to God. We call it “building.” Building – not in the sense of literal drywall, windows, doors or carpet – but helping to build the Kingdom of God. When you share Jesus in word and deed, you build up the Kingdom of God. This third tool – “building” - is all about having a ministry mindset. Being outwardly focused. Being service oriented. It’s about wanting to touch people’s lives with the power of Jesus.

BUILDING GOD’S KINGDOM: KEY TRUTHS

First, you are called to build God's kingdom. Every follower of Jesus is called to share Christ in word and deed. When you hear the word "minister" many people think of men who wear funny white collars or say "Gawd" instead of "God." But the Bible makes it quite clear that every follower of Jesus is a minister. Not every believer is a pastor, to be sure, but every believer is a minister. God created you and called you into His family for this very purpose. Anytime you use your God-given talents to tell someone about Jesus and His love or you help someone in a practical way because you love Jesus, you're being a minister. You're ministering. If you're a Christian and you say, "I'm not called to ministry" you could not be more wrong. You may not be called to be a pastor, but you are called to ministry. Every follower of Jesus is called to ministry or service.

The Bible says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Eph. 2:10 NIV) Ministry begins when you accept the fact that, one, God made you; two, God made you to help build His Kingdom; and, three, God already knows what He wants you to do. That verse applies to every follower of Jesus and – since it was written to a local church (the church in the city of Ephesus) – it applies to every local church. Every follower of Jesus is called to be a contributor not just a consumer. Every local church is called to be a place that's full of good works. How does that happen? You go out and find places to serve and to minister—maybe in a church program, maybe out in the community – but the purpose is to build God's Kingdom and share Christ through your words and your deeds.

Second, you help to build God's Kingdom uniquely. The Bible explicitly says that every Jesus follower has different or unique spiritual abilities. "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other." (1 Cor 12:7 NLT) In addition, it's been my experience as a pastor just observing people that this uniqueness goes deeper than someone having a gift in music or someone else a gift in teaching. We have different passions. We have different personalities. We have different life experiences. And God brings all of that together in unique, wonderful ways to build His Kingdom. You are a unique creation of God and you are also a unique, special tool to build His Kingdom. There's no one equipped quite like you to serve God in building His Kingdom.

It's been suggested that just as individual Christians are unique in how they serve the Lord, so, also, local churches can be unique and different. In other words, every church should cover the basics – worship, education, missions, for example – but it's great when a church develops expertise in a certain kind of ministry depending on the needs of those around them as well as the God-given passions and abilities of those in the church. I'm intrigued by that idea. I wonder how Karl Road Baptist Church will flesh out this new mission and vision in the years ahead. It's quite likely that we will sense God prompting us towards

certain, specific kinds of ministry that, one, meet real needs in the Northland area and, two, match the passions and abilities of our members and friends.

Third, building God's Kingdom means serving others. How do you serve God? You serve others. Some people want to serve God, but they have no interest in serving people. You can only ever serve God by sharing Jesus with others through your words and deeds. This life is a preparation for eternity. God grants you so many years here on earth – 50, 70, maybe even 90 – to practice what you're going to do in Heaven forever and ever. You'll serve God in Heaven. What does that mean? It's impossible to say, but it will probably entail serving His people in some way, shape or form. This life functions like a pre-school before real school begins; it's the pre-season before the real season begins; it's the rehearsal before the real play begins. So, learn to serve God by serving others now because you're going to be doing it forever in Heaven!

Fourth, building God's Kingdom is as much about your attitude as it is your ability. Here's a simple question: "Do you live to serve or to be served?" Often your attitude tells the real story. When you serve, are you joyful or cranky? Are you a blessing to be around or someone to be avoided? Do you insist on your own way or can you defer to others? Jesus said, "Whoever wants to become first among you must serve the rest of you like a slave. In the same way, the Son of Man did not come to be served. He came to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many people." (Mt 20:27-28 NCV) Even more wonderful than what Jesus actually did in the way of service - teaching God's truth, healing sick people, finding lost people, dying on the cross and rising again for our sins – is the attitude with which He served.

Years ago, Howard Hendricks – a popular seminary professor and speaker – was ministering at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC. It was a Thursday morning father/son breakfast at 6:30 am. There were many people present from the military, quite a few from various government agencies, some craftsmen and some laborers of various kinds. Quite a mix of people. After Hendricks finished speaking and the meeting was dismissed, he looked over to his right and there he saw Mark Hatfield who was then the U.S. Senator from Oregon. Hatfield was stacking chairs and picking up napkins that had fallen on the floor. If you're impressed that you're a U.S. Senator, you don't stack chairs or pick up dirty napkins. And if you think this church is just lucky to have you around, you don't serve and you won't serve. So do you live to serve or to be served? Your attitude is every bit as important as your ability.

BUILDING GOD'S KINGDOM: JESUS' WAY.

First of all, serving like Jesus means being available. When you read the stories about Jesus, you discover He was willing to be interrupted. Have you ever thought of the significance of that fact? On one occasion, Jesus was walking along and some blind men started yelling at him. The Bible says, "Two blind

men sitting by the road heard that Jesus was going by, so they shouted, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!'.... Jesus stopped and said to the blind men, 'What do you want me to do for you?'" (Matt. 20:30,32 NCV) Many of the miracles Jesus performed came out of an interruption. Jesus allowed Himself to be interrupted. Here's a thought. If you want to be used by God and if you want to serve God, you must be willing to be interrupted.

Now, I'm preaching to myself here, because I'm pretty task oriented. I've got my daily and weekly "to do" list and whenever I can go back and see I've accomplished all of those tasks, why, it's like I have a religious experience right then and there! But, over the years, I've learned that a lot of ministry opportunities come unannounced. Many opportunities to serve others come by way of "divine detours" away from my carefully planned schedule. No, I'm not advocating lack of planning or even just letting everyone else set my agenda. I'm just saying that I see in Jesus a willingness to be interrupted that I need to learn.

What keeps you from being fully available to help build God's Kingdom? One obstacle is self-centeredness. The Bible says, "...Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand." (Phil 2:4 MSG) The number one enemy of ministry or service is busyness. We think that busyness absolves us from the need to serve the Lord by serving others. My schedule, my agenda, my "to do" list, my ambitions matter more than your needs. What is that? Self-centeredness. Do you ever hang a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door of your heart? It's possible to say, in effect, "Don't disturb my life. Don't mess up my plans, my schedule, my carefully laid out life." Be available!

Another obstacle to availability is perfectionism. It's great to strive for excellence in all that you do. That glorifies God. But you can confuse excellence with perfectionism. The Bible strikes a balance. It says, "Those who wait for perfect weather will never plant seeds; those who look at every cloud will never harvest crops." (Ecc. 11:4 NCV) In other words, whether its farming or life in general, if you wait for perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done! Instead, you're called to do the very best you can for Jesus with what you have at your disposable today. Your efforts to help build God's Kingdom don't have to be perfect for God to use them. God is pleased to use and bless your humble efforts to advance His work in this world. Don't wait for perfect conditions in your life to begin serving. Don't wait for things to settle down before you minister. Don't say, "If I can't do it perfectly, I won't even try." Instead, say, "Lord, here's the very best I can for You today" and then get up and do it. Be available!

Yet another obstacle to being available is materialism. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters.... You cannot serve both God and money." (Luke 16:13 NLT) One of the most important personal decisions you will make in your life is this one: "Am I going to help build God's Kingdom or my own kingdom?" If God wants to make you financially wealthy, great! But when you make getting rich the number one goal in your life, I guarantee you that you'll never serve the Lord in

any meaningful way. The Devil will just keep you so busy chasing after money and all the things money can buy that serving the Lord will become the last priority of all. You'll never discover your unique ministry or place of service because money will be more important. There's other ways to be materialistic. If your job is keeping you from having any kind of meaningful involvement in building God's Kingdom, you need to make an adjustment. Be available!

Secondly, serving like Jesus means being grateful. Maybe you remember the story of Jesus raising His friend, Lazarus, from the dead. Before performing that amazing miracle, He prayed, "... 'Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.'" (John 11:41-42 NLT) In everything Jesus did – even in the most difficult and tough moments of His life and ministry - you see an attitude of gratitude. Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament command, "Serve the LORD with gladness..." (Ps 11:2 NKJV) The primary reason you can serve the Lord gladly every day is symbolized in what we're going to do at the end of today's service. Communion is a reminder that Jesus gave His life for you and was raised again so you can live eternally. If God did nothing else for you, that's reason enough to be grateful for the rest of your life. The Bible says, "For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. 1:9 NLT)

But as with availability, there are obstacles to gratitude. One barrier is comparing and criticizing. You can't be grateful and compare yourself to others or criticize others at the same time. The Bible says, "What right do you have to criticize someone else's servants? Only their Lord can decide if they are doing right.... (Rom 14:4 CEV) Is there anything more ridiculous than competing with other followers of Jesus when it comes to doing ministry? We're on the same team! We have the same goal! When you compare yourself to others in building God's Kingdom, you'll never know the joy of gratitude. Focus instead on what God has done for you and the privilege of serving Him. Be grateful!

Another obstacle to gratitude is wrong motivations. Jesus said, "When you do good deeds, don't try to show off. If you do, you won't get a reward from your Father in heaven." (Matt. 6:1 CEV) Showing off and being a servant just doesn't mix. Why are you serving Jesus? Is it to get admiration from others? Is it an attempt to impress God or make a bargain with God, as in "God, I'll serve you, but I expect You to take care of all my problems." If you serve Jesus out of wrong motivations, you will lose any sense of gratitude. Be grateful!

Thirdly, serving like Jesus means being faithful. Just before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus said to His Father, "I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do." (John 17:4 NLT) Jesus never gave up. Jesus got the job done. Jesus persevered until His mission was completed.

That's faithfulness. You will probably retire from your job or career someday, but the Bible never speaks of you retiring from helping to build God's Kingdom!

Do you know what will help you stay faithful in the Lord's work right up to the very last day of your life here on earth? For one thing, remember that faithfulness pleases the Lord. The Bible says, "... Our first duty is to be faithful to the one we work for..." (1 Cor. 4:2 CEV) Because you love God, you just love doing the things that give God pleasure and joy. When you serve God faithfully, you please God. Be faithful! Here's something else that will help you to be faithful. Remember that what you do for the Lord matters eternally. The Bible says, "...Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort." (1 Cor. 15:58 MSG). Can you say that of any other kind of work or effort you do in this life? Whatever you do for Jesus and in His Name has eternal value. Everything? Well, Jesus said, "And if you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded." (Matt. 10:42 NLT)

Many years ago now, two teenage boys tried to get into a special church service one night in Charlotte, NC. The place was packed out. Every seat was filled. They decided to give up, so they turned around and were about to leave. An usher noticed them and said, "Come with me. I'll help you find a seat." Then he personally escorted them to a place where he knew there were two seats. That night both of those young men received Jesus as their Savior. Oh, I forgot to mention that one of those two teenagers was none other than Billy Graham. Do you think that usher will get some credit in Heaven? You have no idea of the eternal significance of small acts of service, love, kindness and thoughtfulness done in the Name of Jesus. In God's eyes, there's no little service. Be faithful!

What else will help you stay faithful? Remember that you will be rewarded. Make it your aim to hear Jesus say to you someday, "... 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'" (Matt. 25:21 NLT) There will come a day when God will say to you, "What did you do to help build My Kingdom? What did you do with what I gave to you? What did you do with your spiritual gifts, your unique abilities, your passions, your experiences in life, your resources of time and treasure?" What will you say on that day? "God, I was too busy fulfilling my own ambitions. God, I had my own agenda. God, I was busy preparing for retirement not eternity." Brothers and sisters, I'll tell you what I long to hear God say and do on that great day. "Good job, Rick! Way to go, Rick! Well done! You did what I put you on earth to do! You brought glory to Me! You helped build my Kingdom by serving others in Jesus' Name! Come on in, Rick, and enjoy eternity and all the rewards I have planned for you."

Author and seminary professor, Leonard Sweet, overheard one of his students complaining to another student about the church that he'd been assigned to as part of his practical training requirements for graduation. The other student said

something that stopped Sweet dead in his tracks. Her comment was, “You know, the world’s a better place because Michelangelo didn’t say, ‘I don’t do ceilings.’” As you might know, he painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome – an artistic masterpiece. As Sweet thought about that statement, he had to admit she was right. My friend, if you’re going to be faithful in whatever ministry God is calling you to do, then you need to understand that. After all, this world’s a better place because Moses didn’t say, “I don’t do confronting Pharaohs and leading stubborn people to a new country.” The world’s a better place because a young man named David didn’t say, “I don’t do giants.” The world’s a better place because an exile named Daniel didn’t say, “I don’t do lions’ dens.” The world’s a better place because a teenage girl named Mary didn’t say, “I don’t do virgin births.” The world’s a better place because Paul, the great apostle, didn’t say, “I don’t do jail and getting beat up for telling others about Jesus.” And, above all, the world’s a better place because Jesus didn’t say, “I don’t do crosses.” You were created to help build the Kingdom of God. Do it. Get after it. For the glory of God.