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1 Peter 4:7-11

File: Purpose(mid)5

One of the more enduring popular artists of recent times is Elvis. A couple of years ago, Elvis' album of greatest hits became the number one album in the nation, 25 years after the guy died! Yet in spite of his enormous success, Elvis was, according to friends, an unfulfilled and unhappy man. He died of obesity & drug dependency at age 42.

In an interview with his wife, Priscilla, said this about her 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 & he knew he wasn't fulfilling it. So he'd go on stage and he wouldn't have to think about it.*"

That's interesting isn't it? Not knowing your purpose in life leads to confusion in life. And if we are confused we can do one of two things. We can chase something that we think is worthwhile, relationships, success, career, money, and over time realise that these things don't truly satisfy. Or we can involve ourselves in something that means we don't have to think about it. We find something that helps us cope with life. In John Lennon's words, "Whatever gets you through the night, is alright, its alright."

But over the last few weeks we have been looking at the divine blueprint for life & discovered that we were formed for God's family, we were planned for God's pleasure, we were created to be like Christ We were made for God's mission. And tonight we want conclude this series by remembering that we were shaped to be God's servants.

Jesus said to his disciples in Mark 10, "*whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*"

And I think that makes perfect sense. God has given us all talents and gifts and abilities. God has put you together in a unique way. He has allowed everything in your past to happen for a reason, so that you could grow and mature and become more like Jesus. You have been placed where you are right now for a purpose.

The question is are you willing to share what you have received to help those around you? Are you willing to use your gifts to strengthen other people's faith? Do you see that one of the purposes of your life is to minister to others? Now I don't mean you have to be ordained and learn how to wear a dog collar and a clerical gown. I want to know, have you been so impressed by the service that Jesus has given you, that you want to serve others?

In some ways this is the critical issue for the modern Church. Sure we are happy to worship, we may be open to be part of a Church, yes we want to grow in our personal relationship with Jesus, for each of these things obviously are a help to us. But to serve others, life is far too busy to do that. To get involved, why no one did that to me. To reach out, what if they reject me? So we are happy for others to serve us, but not so happy to be involved in service.

1. The Focal Point of Ministry Yet our passage in 1 Peter 4, reminds us that the focal point in life, is that its not all about me. Verse 2, reminds us that we as Christians no longer live as the rest of the human race does, according to our own human desires, our focus is now on the will of God & on His plan and purpose for my life right now. To realise this, is to place our focus away from

self and onto our Heavenly Father.

But its more than that, verse 5 reminds us that we are all going to have to give an account of our lives to God. We are all going to have to stand before God, in all His majesty and splendour while he asks us, why didn't you serve the people in your Church more faithfully? Why were you happy to turn up and receive and not give? Why did you utter those words that tore someone down, when you could have used your same mouth to build someone up?

For verse 6 reminds us that we will be judged according to what we did in regard to the body. We will all be judged. For this life has been given to us, in trust. What we are and what we do has been a gift from God, to be used in the service of the people around us.

The truth is, whether we like it or not, that according to v 7 , the end is near. Our facing God is just around the corner. It might be because we die and wake up finding ourselves at the end of days, or it may be because Jesus is coming again and that our lives here on earth will be interrupted as eternity breaks into time. But either way the end is near.

So our focus now as Christians, our motivation for life is "What can I do that will bring praise to my Saviour?" How can I show my thanks for all that He has done for me? How can I serve my God, by serving those around me who were made in the image of my God?

2. Flavour of Ministry Well how do we turn those sentiments into actions? How do we move our focal point for service into our flavour of service. Well I think it comes down to moving our faith from words into attitudes and actions.

Look again with at verse 7, "*The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.*" Our attitude needs to be a prayerful one. For the more we spend in the presence of God, the more God's commitment to the service of others will rub off. The more we hand over our lives to God, the more he will take up the reigns of our lives.

Prayer is when we move our focus off our lives & put it onto our God. Where we remove the distractions of the TV and home and family and crying kids and put it onto our Lord, our Saviour, our Sanctifier. Prayer is then the fuel that powers the life of service. Prayer is the switch that turns the electricity of life on the life of ministry.

So why do we find prayer so hard to do? We could say we're too busy, and for many of us that is true. But the real reason is that we think we can do things in our own strength, whereas the truth is that if we want our lives to be full of service, we can only possibly do it with the help of God's strength.

But prayer is something that everyone of us can do. Everyone of us, regardless of age, self confidence, gifts and talents can do it. And the truth is without it our Christian life lacks flavour.

Let me tell you a story about prayer. William Carey was a great Christian man. He accomplished a Bible translation work unequalled in missionary history and, has been called by many "the father of modern missions." But did you know that while Carey laboured in India translating and printing parts, or all of the Bible, into forty languages, his sister lay on her back in London and prayed hour after hour, month after month, for all the details, problems, and struggles of her brother's work.

Who was more faithful? Carey by going out and using his great intellect and skills or his sister,

who apparently was bed ridden, who daily, hourly in fact shared his ministry through her prayers of intercession? Who was more faithful? Well it's a silly question isn't it? They were both faithful. One highly visible, the other known by very few, but both vitally important. For prayer has to flavour our ministry and our service.

But another attitude that has to affect our service is that of gratitude. Verse 9 reminds us *to offer hospitality to one another, without grumbling*. Boy that hit home to me. Complaints, grumbling, a bad attitude can't flavour our service because it's the opposite to God's grace and mercy and love. It will mean our manner will counteract our message. And it will render it useless.

So prayer and gratitude must flavour our service and lead to actions filled with love and hospitality. Verse 8, *"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling."*

Love, a willingness to put the other first must flavour all that we do. Hospitality, a willingness to open up our homes, to share our belongings for the good of others must characterise our service. Apparently in Albania, hospitality is evidently very common. It is part of their culture. And because the country is mostly Muslim, Christians have needed to band together to encourage one another in the faith. You see the Albanians have a saying "an Albanian's house belongs to God and His guests."

Now that's a change of mindset isn't it? In Australia our home is our castle. We have worked hard to buy it, we have paid good rent to live there. It is our sanctuary that we can escape to in a difficult world. Yet the Albanians are right, we don't own it, it has been lent to us by God in trust, to use it for his glory and for his purposes.

God's purpose for us is to serve others, so our focus needs to be on his glory, our service needs to be flavoured by prayer and gratitude, by love and by hospitality. And the form of our service to one another needs to involve both words and actions.

3. The Form of our Ministry. Look with me at verse 11, *"If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ."*

Service involves words. It includes teaching, preaching, warnings & encouragement. So if anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. That's how important words are. The old saying stick and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me, is absolute rubbish. Words can hurt but words can also heal. Words can confuse. But words can also make things abundantly clear. So we need to listen to those who speak God's word to us so that they can encourage us towards works of service. And we need to use words so that we can encourage others also towards similar acts of service.

But that doesn't mean we aren't to do something as well. Peter continues, *"If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides,"* If we are to serve, we can't just do it in our strength. For service is hard, service often has no rewards. Service is about giving out, often with no hope of getting in return. And you can't continue to do that without God's strength. You can't continue to give out without God's grace, being renewed day by day. So every act of service is hard whether little or big, and that is why God wants to help you with it.

But Rick Warren, in his book *The Purpose Driven Life* says *"If you really desire to be used by*

God, you must understand a powerful truth: The very experiences that you have resented or regretted most in life - the ones you've wanted to hide and forget - are the experiences God wants to use to help others. They are your ministry."

God wants to use all of your life, not just the good bits. In fact the reason you might have experienced that debilitating illness, that sense of loss, that tragedy, that loneliness, that fear, may be to help others cope with the very same difficulties. There is so much hurt in our community, there is so much hurt in our Church community. And unless we somehow put aside our masks, open ourselves up to one another, make ourselves vulnerable then many of those hurts won't be healed and many of us will continue to struggle with these issues all by ourselves.

But to be honest, you will need God's strength to let others serve you in that manner. And you will need God's strength to help others, because it could well open up a can of worms inside your heart that you have spent years trying to screw tight!

Now the devil will try and tempt you away from this sort of lifestyle. He will tell you that you are too busy and in a way he is probably right, so that means you will have to get your priorities right with God. He will tell you that the standard of service is perfection and you're not good enough, but the standard isn't perfection it is faithfulness.

He will encourage you to procrastinate, there is plenty of time to do that stuff once your work calms down, once you've paid off the mortgage, once your difficult with your family resolves itself, once you are more financially secure. But don't believe him, there will never be a right time in his mind for you to serve.

Remember what Albert Schweitzer once said "The only really happy people are those who have learned to serve". So don't make excuses. Abraham could have said he was too old. Jacob that he was too insecure, Joseph had been wronged by his family and Moses stuttered. Rahab had been a prostitute and David was a murderer. Elijah was suicidal and Jeremiah was depressed. Peter was impulsive and Martha was a worry wort. Paul had poor health and Timothy was timid.

The Bible is full of misfits, people who could have found excuses not to serve. But they were so taken by what God had done for them, that they placed their faith in God and God used them mightily. And God promises to use us too, if we stop making excuses, if we remember that God has a will, a purpose, a plan for our lives and if we seek to emulate our Master Jesus by serving others through both our words and our actions.

One day Napoleon pointed at a map of China and he said, "There lies a sleeping giant. If it ever wakes up it will shake the world." Every week I look at our Church and say, "There lies a sleeping giant. If everybody who came here, served here, we could shake not just our Terranora community but our world, for the Lord." The question is are we as Church willing to wake up?