

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Exploring Spirituality: Why Am I Here?

Meeting with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series

Version 1.0 - 11/4/10



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

Curriculum Development: The iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition curriculum development was lead by the **Center for Creative Ministry**. **General Editor:** Monte Sahlin; **Assistant Editor:** Debbonnaire Kovacs; **Directional Advisory:** Brad Forbes, Carole Kilcher, Ceri Myers, Cesar Gonzalez, Clayton Kinney, Curtis Rittenour, Dave Osborne, Dave VanDenburgh, Gerry Chudleigh, Jane Thayer, Jerry Thomas, John Appel, Jose Rojas, Kim Johnson, Nicole Chao, Paul Richardson, Rich DuBose, Shasta Nelson, William Sutton; **Pastoral Advisory:** Claudio Consuegra, Collette Pekar, Dave Hutman, Don Driver, Fredrick Russell, Jerry Nelson, Jesse Wilson, Leslie Bumgardner, Loren Fenton, Rebecca Brillhart; **Unit Authors:** Alberto Valenzuela, Althea Pineda, Corienne Hay, Debbonnaire Kovacs, Ed Dickerson, Gianluca Bruno, Gil Bahnsen, Greg Nelson, Jack Calkins, James Whibberding, Karen Collum, Monte Sahlin, Norma Sahlin, Pam Splawinski, Patty Ntihuka, Reinder Bruinsma, Ryan Bell; **Additional contribution** by Maria Ovando-Gibson; **Additional editing:** Dave Gemmell, Meredith Carter; **Graphic Design:** Mind Over Media; **Layout:** Paul D. Young; **Web Development:** Narrow Gate Media.

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iFOLLOW

www.ifollowdiscipleship.org

Why am I Here?

This presentation is designed for people who have not yet come to a point in their spiritual journey where they have decided to become a follower of Jesus.

Learning Objectives

1. Determine what purpose you are now living for
2. Evaluate that purpose and decide if it's the one you really want
3. Learn some specific ways to discover the purpose your were made for
4. Write a simple, personal mission statement

Content Outline

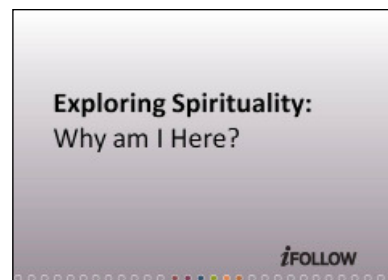
1. Larry Walters, Man with a Mission
2. Living Life with a Purpose
3. Discovering Your Purpose
4. Living Your Purpose
5. Conclusion

Background Material for the Presenter

Larry was a truck driver, but his life-long dream was to fly. When he graduated from high school, he joined the Air Force in hopes of becoming a pilot. Unfortunately, poor eyesight disqualified him. So when he finally left the service, he had to satisfy himself with watching others fly the fighter jets that crisscrossed the skies over his backyard. As he sat there in his lawn chair, he dreamed about the magic of flying.

Then one day Larry Walters got an idea. He went down to the local army-navy surplus store and bought a tank of helium and forty-five weather balloons. These were not your brightly colored party balloons, these were heavy-duty spheres measuring more than four feet across when fully inflated.

Back in his yard, Larry used straps to attach the balloons



to his lawn chair, which was just a typical aluminum lawn chair, the kind you might have in your own back yard. He and some friends anchored the chair to the bumper of his jeep and inflated the balloons with helium. He took a CB radio, sandwiches, cold drinks, a camera, and his pellet gun, figuring he could pop a few of the balloons when it was time to return to earth.

His preparation complete, Larry Walters sat in his chair and cut the anchoring cord. His plan was to lazily float up a couple hundred feet, spend awhile enjoying the wonder of flight he'd been dreaming about all his life, then float back down to terra firma. But things didn't quite work out that way.

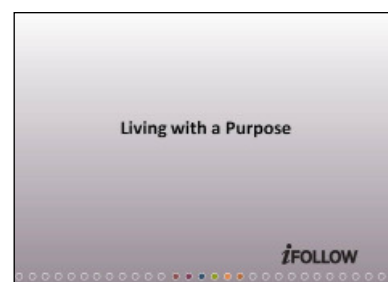
When he cut the cord, he didn't lazily float up; he shot up as if fired out of a cannon! He didn't go up a couple of hundred feet, either. He rocketed up and up until he finally leveled off at 16,000 feet. That's almost three miles straight up into the atmosphere. At that height, he was afraid to risk deflating any of the balloons lest he unbalance the load and really experience flying. But after 45 minutes, he did shoot several balloons, then accidentally dropped his pellet gun overboard. He slowly descended, and got caught in some utility lines, causing a twenty minute blackout in a Long Beach neighborhood. But at least he was able to climb down.

Unfortunately, while up there, Larry had drifted into the approach corridor for Los Angeles International Airport, which put him in violation of FAA regulations concerning flying in an airport zone without maintaining two-way communication with control, so the minute he landed he was arrested. As he was being led away in handcuffs, a television reporter called out, "Mr. Walters, why did you do it?" Larry stopped, eyed the man, and then replied nonchalantly, "A man can't just sit around!" (Wikipedia)

Living with a Purpose

It's hard not to have some degree of admiration for a man like that. Sure, his idea was crazy and foolishly dangerous, pretty ludicrous. But the fact is, flying was his lifelong dream and he decided to go after it. When you consider how many people in this world are satisfied to risk nothing, to try nothing, to imagine nothing, you begin to appreciate someone like Larry Walters. You begin to respect that he was someone consumed with a mission. And not only did he have the vision and strategic plan to carry it out, he had the passion that was willing to take risks in spite of the odds. "A man just can't sit around!" As a matter of fact, Mr. Walters was in brief demand after his stunt, as a motivational speaker.

So many people are satisfied with a life mission of simply trying to make it to death safely.



But in the end, when they look back on their life, do you think they feel satisfied and meaningful?

Howard Hendricks puts it this way: “A mission is a charge, a guiding mandate that defines a task. In fact, ‘mission’ derives from a word that means ‘to send’ or ‘sent.’ Thus a person with a mission is a person with a purpose. He is out to accomplish something. He feels a sense of responsibility to fulfill that purpose, and if he is genuinely dedicated to it, it guides his actions.” (Hendricks)

This is how it worked with Larry Walters. Everything he thought and planned and ended up doing was guided by his one mission and purpose in life – to fly one way or another. Imagine the thinking and planning he had to do to accomplish this. Imagine the risk of ridicule he faced as he may have shared his plan with others. What do you think those sales clerks said when he bought 48 big weather balloons and the helium to fill them up? How about that airlines pilot? Mission-focused living is risky. But in the end, it’s the only way to live successfully and effectively.

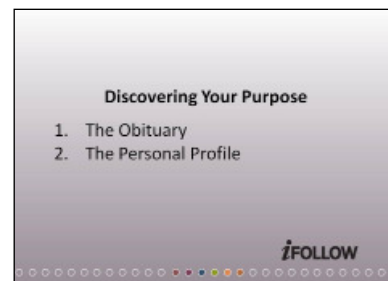
So have you ever asked yourself the question, What is my purpose in life? What is my mission? Why am I here? Why am I using up oxygen on this planet? What is my life all about?

Discovering Your Purpose

There are several ways to discover your life purpose. One of the following methods could be an eye-opening experience for you. It could also add much value and richness to your life.

1. The Obituary: One way to approach purpose is to think about coming to the end of your life and looking back on all you’ve become and all you’ve accomplished. What do your actions and behaviors say about your purpose? If one knew nothing about what you believed and valued, what would they know about your life purpose based on what they observed you do during your life? If you were attending your own funeral and someone who knew you well was delivering your obituary, what would you truly want to hear them say about you? How would you desire more than anything to be described at that moment?

2. The Personal Profile: This is another good tool to discover who you are and how you are wired; what are your strengths, gifts, talents, temperament, passion, values, and unique life experiences? Knowing your personal profile gives big clues to the unique purpose you are called to and equipped to live. Life purpose is the reason we are on this planet. It’s the thing we are meant to accomplish, the gift we are meant to bring. It’s not simply about a job or even a vocation. It is the round-the-clock, twenty-four-hour, every-



day-of-your-life expression of who you are when you are reaching your full potential. Life purpose is spiritual in origin and uniquely shaped to you. So looking at how you are “shaped” helps you discover what your unique life purpose is, the special contribution you have been equipped to make in the lives of others and this world.

The truth is, when we are “on purpose” we are most fulfilled. We are contributing and making a difference in transformative and meaningful ways. We live with a sense of congruence and alignment with who we feel we really are. We consequently have a much higher level of peace and passion because we know deep inside that we’re living out our true purpose, **our life** not some one else’s life or the life some else thinks we should live. Our life satisfaction level is profoundly high because we can see that we’re making a meaningful contribution to others. We are living in harmony with God’s dream for our lives and that brings with it a profound sense of joy.

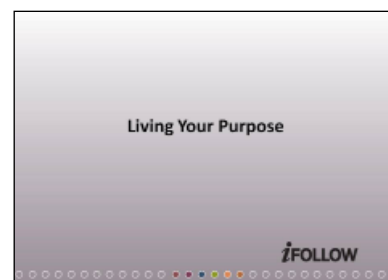
And the flip side is equally true: when we are “off purpose” we are discontented and unfulfilled. We feel off balance and rudderless, just kind of going with wherever the popular flow goes. We use up lots of energy that doesn’t go anywhere. It’s easy simply spinning our wheels, going fast but going nowhere. We’re easily distracted by whatever voice shouts the loudest; the squeaky wheel gets the grease. We tend to say “yes” to too many things and then get overtired. We lose our sense of direction and get easily confused. So we end up often feeling dead, disconnected, dissatisfied, and ultimately burned out too quickly and too often. And we come to the end of our lives and have lots of regrets. On the other hand, a clear life purpose is like a big neon sign that helps us find our way out of the swamp when we get stuck.

3. The Mission Statement: A third tool is to try writing your life purpose in one sentence. “For me, to live is ...” (complete the sentence). “For me, to be fully alive is ...” (complete the sentence). “My true life legacy will be ...” (complete that sentence).

It has been said that life purpose is a path. It is like East. You cannot ever get to a place called East—it is a direction, not a location—but you may be on a path your whole life going in that direction. There will be plenty of voices, internal and external, telling you to go in different directions. And sometimes you will listen, especially when you are unsure of your purpose. But finding and claiming a life purpose gives you the truest direction for your life. A true life purpose statement can make you virtually unstoppable.

Living Your Purpose

Let’s put some “flesh” on this whole dynamic process. What does it look like in real life? The following are two



individuals who lived their lives with purpose and stayed “on purpose” even when faced with serious obstacles. And inherent in their journey was the secret to being empowered to live well. Their examples provide some valuable principles.

Saint Paul was a man of great passion. In the first part of his life, he would have described his life purpose as honoring and serving God by bringing people into obedience to the true religion. He was a tireless zealot with the goal of keeping religion both theologically and sociologically pure. Consequently, he lived out his purpose with great ideological fervor, heading up squads of religious soldiers given the mandate to arrest all dissenters. He was extremely successful in his work. The “golden boy” of the old guard.

Then one day he experienced a profound change of heart. Though the essence of his passion didn’t shift, his life purpose and strategic methodology did. He was convicted—by means of a radical and transformative divine encounter—that the people he had been so vigorously attacking were followers of the same God he was so passionately serving. So if he wanted to continue serving the same God with equal passion, he needed to widen his embrace to include the people he had labeled as dissenters and accept their belief in Jesus as the Messiah of God. We call that a major paradigm shift.

So now he lived his life with a new purpose. Here’s the way he described it: “Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant, dog dung. I’ve dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by him ... Now don’t get me wrong: By no means do I count myself having achieved perfection in all of this, but I’ve got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward - to Jesus. Forgetting the past, I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back.” (Philippians 3:8-9, 13-14, The Message)

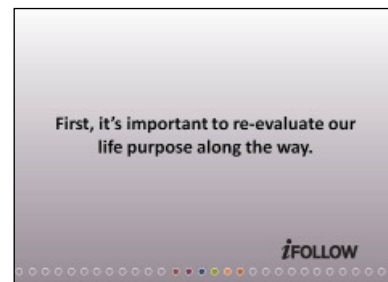
With this new purpose firmly implanted in his passionate heart and innovative mind, Paul lived his life with profound meaning and effectiveness. He faced obstacle after obstacle—imprisonment, beating, shipwreck, exhaustion, hunger, ridicule, persecution, rejection—but because he was crystal clear on his purpose and felt deeply the validity and significance of it, he was empowered to keep going. His effectiveness was legendary. He impacted the then-known world with his message, planting and building spiritual communities wherever he went. He started a movement that continues in force globally today.

Here’s his perspective on his life when he came to the end: “The time of my death is near. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me; the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day.” (2 Timothy 4:6-8, New Living Translation)

No regrets. No complaints. No capitulations. Faithful to the purpose all the way to the end, he described plenty of failures along the way. But the power of living on purpose is that you can keep going after failure. You don’t have to be defined by it. You can get back on the horse and keep on riding toward your goal. And he did.

Notice four principles of living on purpose.

First, it's important to re-evaluate our life purpose along the way. And if we don't choose to do it, often life forces us to. A crisis comes that requires an intentional re-evaluation, readjustment, and refocusing. And sometimes, as in the case of Paul, we discover that we're living with a less than meaningful purpose and need to change the focus.



In other words, there are some purposes more worth living for than others. And it would be tragic to come to the end of life and make that painful discovery. Better to evaluate now whether we're living for a worthy purpose or not and make necessary adjustments. It takes courage. But it's absolutely worth it in the end in order to end with no regrets. Are you living the most meaningful purpose possible for yourself? Is your purpose in harmony with what God wants for you and what you were created to live for?

Second, to achieve your life purpose well you need to "forget" the past. That is, not let the past define you whether it's your successes or your failures. We tend to do several things when it comes to our past: we either glory in it in pride or we wallow in it in shame or we deny it in pain. Any of those responses fixates us in the past and immobilizes us from pursuing God's goal for our lives.



A man complained to his rabbi of depression. His life lately seemed like an endless string of failures, disappointments, and missed opportunities. Why, he asked, had God condemned him to live such a frustrating existence?

The rabbi listened carefully and after some moments of contemplation, he asked the man to reach behind him and remove a large volume from his bookshelf. Assuming this was some profound tome of spiritual wisdom, the man reached for the volume. He noticed to his surprise that it was an almanac of sports statistics.

"Read page 543 aloud," the rabbi instructed. And the man began reading the lifetime batting averages of baseball's greatest hitters. Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Ted Williams. "Not one of them batted more than 400," observed the rabbi. "That means more than six in ten times, the greatest of the great struck out, popped out or flied out. More than six in ten times, they failed. Are you better than they were?" the rabbi asked the man. "Why do you expect more of yourself than they did?"

It's easy to get fixated on our past. But that only immobilizes us from pushing ourselves toward the goal of our life purpose. We become conservative in our actions, afraid to do anything that might lead to failure again or might make us look bad. We end up paying attention to things we ought to be overlooking. William James, the American philosopher,

psychologist and educator at Harvard University, in 1890 wrote, “The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook.”

Third, we must point ourselves in the “right” direction.

Not just any direction or any goal will do, if we want to live God’s plan and purpose for us. Some directions are much more meaningful than others. You’ve no doubt heard the phrase, “When you come to the end of your life, no one wishes they had spent more time at the office.”



That’s referring to priorities. Right focus. A worthwhile purpose typically revolves around relationships – building meaningful, significant, fulfilling relationships. And that kind of purpose usually involves using your resources to make a difference in people’s lives in some tangible way. The whole idea of service and showing compassion to others makes up the kind of life purpose that brings the highest degree of fulfillment and meaning.

Paul focused the second part of his life on following the example of Jesus and helping people experience Jesus’ love and compassion. And Jesus had once stated clearly his life purpose in this way: “For the Son of Man came, not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for others.”

That example by Jesus is what empowered and motivated and shaped Paul’s life purpose. He kept his eyes on that picture of Jesus and refused to live the many lesser ways to live. He devoted his energies and skills and resources to serving others in the best way he could.

A life purpose that involves serving others (loving and giving compassion in tangible, meaningful ways) is the most satisfying in the end because it aligns with the energy and spirit of the Universe. It is congruent with the highest, strongest human value, love.

Jesus lived his life passionately on purpose, too – to serve and give Himself to others. A few days before He died, He was in a room with His twelve disciples to celebrate the Jewish Passover. Here’s what the story describes in that setting:

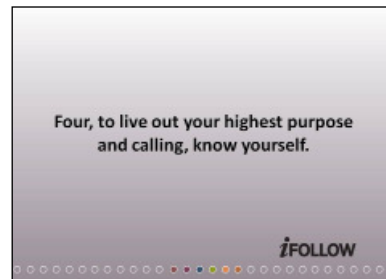
“Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He now showed the disciples the full extent of his love. It was time for supper. Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel he had around him.” (John 13:1-5, New Living Translation)

Notice that the way Jesus chose to show the full extent of his love was to kneel down and wash the dirty feet of his disciples (something the servants were supposed to do but ap

parently weren't there to do that evening). Jesus served as evidence of his love. That's the most divine thing we humans can do – lovingly serve others.

And notice what it was that empowered Jesus to serve via such a menial task. The story says that Jesus knew who he was, what his life purpose and calling were, and where he was going. His identity was completely clear to him. He was living with clarity and full acceptance of himself. And that confidence and profound self-awareness empowered him to serve unselfishly and boldly and radically.

Four, to live out your highest purpose and calling, know yourself. You must embrace your identity (like Jesus did) with confidence and complete acceptance, an identity that transcends your place in life and your various accomplishments (good or bad) and centers in your status as a fully-loved child of God. That kind of self-awareness and acceptance is what empowers you to live “on purpose” through thick and thin, ups and downs, successes and failures.



Conclusion

So what is your life purpose? If you haven't ever articulated it specifically (like writing it down in a sentence), what would your current and past behaviors indicate is your life purpose? What is your example revealing about your true purpose?

Is your current purpose worth living and dying for? Is it something that is bringing service and compassion to people? Are you making a positive difference in this world with your current purpose? Or do you need to re-evaluate your purpose? Do you need one that brings you into harmony and alignment with the highest energy of the Universe, divine love?

What do you bring to your life purpose that empowers you to live it out well? Do you know yourself? Is your identity clear? Is your identity based upon something that transcends your own ups and downs and other people's opinions of you? Is your identity in harmony with God's view of you?

Is your purpose clear enough and compelling enough so that when you get to the end of your life you and others will know if you've lived it out faithfully and effectively? Are you on purpose enough to face the end with no regrets?

An unusual and tragic situation once took place in a hospital overseas. Every Friday morning a patient would die in the same bed at the hospital regardless of the exact



medical condition. The whole staff was absolutely puzzled and mortified. Some even began to believe it had to do with the supernatural.

So the doctors finally decided to go down to the ward on the next Friday and watch carefully. Friday morning came. The doctors and nurses were in the room with eagle eyes. Nothing. Everything was normal for a Friday morning. The cleaning crew came in for their regular weekly cleaning of the room. And then the staff saw it. One of the cleaning crew unplugged the life support machine so she could plug in the vacuum cleaner. This poor woman had no idea what she was doing. She was so caught up in her own little world of work that she missed the big picture and people were dying because of her narrow perspective.

What a tragic way to live, being so self-absorbed that we never see how we're impacting others. We are here on this planet for a reason. We are each wired differently and uniquely to live out our purposes as effectively as possible. Our highest calling is to love and serve unselfishly in ways that bless life not detract from it. And our deepest satisfaction and fulfillment come from living out that purpose faithfully.

Handouts in this Package

1. Participant's Notes
2. Four Principles of Living On Purpose



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Action Plan
& Presenter
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Additional Resources

Hendricks, Howard (1995). *Standing Together: Impacting Your Generation*. New York: The Doubleday Religious Publishing Group.

Smith, Huston (2001). *Why Religion Matters: The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

Warren, Rick (2002). *The Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Websites

Wikipedia, "Larry Walters." Accessed at: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry_Walters

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Discussion Questions

1. Would you ever do anything like what Larry Walters did? Why or why not? What does this tell you about yourself?
2. Share a time when you felt excited, purpose-driven, and successful at what you were trying to do. What was it about that time that fit into who you are as a person?
3. How do you point yourself in the right direction?
4. On a scale of one to ten, how well do you feel you know yourself at a deep heart level. What can you do to improve that number?
5. Have you ever been involved in an organization's attempt to craft a mission statement? What was the hardest part? What was the easiest part? Can you use some of the things you learned to help you craft your own personal mission statement?

Group Activities

Purpose: To develop a personal mission statement.

Preparation: Make copies of Handout One for each person. Set up tables with writing materials. If you wish to add creativity, you could also have poster board or large paper, markers, magazines, scissors and glue, etc., for art projects.

Assignment: Divide the group into teams of four, each at a separate table. They will work together on the three strategies, writing obits for themselves or each other, making complete personal profiles, and then trying to finish the three sentence starters that will point them toward writing their own personal mission statements. Let them know in advance that this is likely the start of a long effort; they may not come up with the completed personal mission statement they really want in this one session. But they can make progress and gain some important insights. If you have provided the materials, they may make some of their ideas into posters or collages instead of merely writing lists.

Debrief: Ask those who wish to share, particularly any who have completed personal mission statements or rough drafts.

Time: Allow 15 minutes for each of the three methods (a total of 45 minutes), letting them know at 15-minute intervals that they need to think about moving to the next method. Allow at least another 10 minutes for writing their statement or making a poster, and another 20 minutes for debriefing. The total exercise will take up to 90 minutes.

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Activities

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Handout 1

Why am I Here?

Participant Notes

1. Living with Purpose

“A mission is a charge, a guiding mandate that defines a task. In fact, ‘mission’ derives from a word that means ‘to send’ or ‘sent.’ Thus a person with a mission is a person with a purpose. He is out to accomplish something. He feels a sense of responsibility to fulfill that purpose, and if he is genuinely dedicated to it, it guides his actions.” (Howard Hendricks)

2. Three Ways of Discovering your Life Purpose

A. Writing your obituary

What do your actions and behaviors say about your life purpose?

What would you truly want your obituary to say about you?

B. Your personal profile

How are you “wired” – your temperament, your strengths, your unique life experiences, your passion

C. Your personal mission statement

Complete the statements below.

For me, to live is _____

For me, to be fully alive is _____

My true life legacy will be _____

Now, try to craft a one-line mission statement for yourself.

3. An Example of Living with Purpose: Saint Paul

A. "Before" _____

B. "After" _____

"Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant, dog dung. I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by him ... Now don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself having achieved perfection in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward to Jesus. Forgetting the past, I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back." (Philippians 3:8-9, 13-14, The Message)

C. "The End" _____

"The time of my death is near. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me – the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day." (2 Timothy 4:6-8, New Living Translation)

Handout 2

Four Principles for Living on Purpose

1. Re-evaluate life purpose along the way and change if needed

2. Forget the past

William James, the American philosopher, psychologist and educator at Harvard University, in 1890 wrote, “The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook.”

3. Point in the “right” direction

“I came, not to be served, but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for others.” (Jesus in Mark 10:45)

4. Know yourself; embrace your true identity
