

Your Presence Means There Is Purpose

I often relate more with Cinderella than I do Cinderella. I'm less like a beautiful princess at a ball and more like the girl overwhelmed by her to-do list. Anyone else? The daily responsibilities of motherhood, marriage, work—really, just life in general are enough to make us feel a little lost. Not like which kid needs picked up from where lost, which I've felt, but more like does what I'm doing even matter? Does anyone care about the work I do? Am I fulfilling God's purpose for me? And what does that even mean?

We don't get to see it in the movie, but I bet Cinderella wondered some of these same things. The search for purpose isn't a fictional quest, it's a burning question humanity has asked for hundreds of years.

Who has the Amazon app on their phones? Go ahead, raise your hands. This isn't some kind of test. Okay. Go to the search bar and type in "books about purpose." Now, tap on "filters" in the upper left corner. Look down at the bottom right corner. How many results does the app offer to show you? My app initially told me there were over 10,000 books about purpose. When I narrowed my search down to Christian books about purpose, there were over 4,000 results.

Apparently, you, me, and Cinderella aren't the only ones looking for purpose in our everyday lives. We, as a society, need some help on this search for purpose. And there are many opinions from Christians and non-Christians alike about how to find our purpose in life.

But what if purpose isn't some grand quest? What if you don't have to search for it? What if it's found simply in your existence?

You exist because God, in His incomprehensible wisdom and complete sovereignty, decided that you should be here.

Psalms 139:16 says that God saw you before you were born. Every day of your life was recorded in His book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. And you know what? There is purpose in each of those days, in each of those moments.

When we talk about purpose, we tend to tie it to production as if our purpose is determined by what we do. For a long time, I thought my purpose was to be a teacher. But then, God made it very clear that he wanted me to give that up. After ten years of teaching, I resigned, not knowing what God wanted me to do next. Surely, he didn't just want me to be a mom. Surely, he had a new purpose for me, something new to do.

But what I failed to understand is that God's purpose for me isn't found in what I do, it's found in who I am. My purpose isn't limited to or defined by my job status. And neither is yours.

Raise your hand if you're breathing? Okay, now put your hand on your chest and take a slow,

deep breath. In and out. One more. Notice the way your body moves as oxygen flows in and carbon dioxide releases out.

That breath alone means you have purpose in this day. Tomorrow morning when you wake up with air in your lungs, moving in and out without you even having to think about it, that means you have purpose in the new day. As long as you have breath in your lungs, there is purpose in your presence.

Your soul is made in God's image, created to serve, worship, honor, and glorify Him—that is your purpose. How would your search for purpose change if you settled on the fact that there is purpose in your existence no matter what you are doing?

One of the first questions we ask when meeting someone new is “what do you do?” As if the answer to that question tells us all we need to know about each other. It's no wonder that we tie our feelings of purpose to our positions. And though those details are important, purpose isn't defined by our relationship status, family role, job title, or career path. Defining yourself in this way sets unintended limitations on purpose.

These aren't the only words that set limitations on our feeling of purpose. Far too often, we allow our internal dictionaries, made up of the words we think about ourselves, dictate our purpose. In those internal dictionaries we find words like too old, too young, too loud, too outspoken, too quiet, too shy, too broken, too lost, too much or not enough. Words like incapable, untrained, doubtful, scared, uncertain, unqualified.

You know what I'm talking about don't you? Those words that gnaw at you, that linger in the back of your mind. When you decide to step out of your comfort zone and try something new, they grow louder and louder until they're all you hear.

Or maybe the words in your internal dictionary have actually been spoken about you by others, voices from your past or off-handed remarks you weren't meant to hear. Maybe you've been told you're too this or too that for so long that you've begun to believe it.

What words are in your “internal dictionary”? What words do you hear inside your head and heart when you think about your value or ability to impact the world around you? Maybe the words in your internal dictionary are found in this list I've already talked about, or maybe a different phrase entered your mind. Take a minute and write one or two of those words or phrases on your handout.

For me, that phrase is not enough. With six kids, I often feel like there's not enough of me to go around, someone is always being told to wait. And then there's my husband, who too often gets what's leftover, which most days isn't very much. As a SAHM, I feel like there is always more to do, and I'm not enough to stay on top of the dishes, laundry, cleaning, cooking. In my writing work, I feel like there is constantly some project I've put on the back burner because I just don't have the time or capacity for it.

These feelings of not being enough impact my feelings of purpose because despite my striving to do it all, it's not possible, and I often feel like I'm failing. My inadequacy, my failure to be enough for everyone and everything leaves me feeling a lot like Cinderella—worn out, defeated, overwhelmed, and hopeless. Those questions creep in again: Does what I'm doing even matter? Does anyone care about the work I do? Is this my purpose?

You've felt those questions, too haven't you? You've felt inadequate and then worn out, defeated, overwhelmed, and hopeless. I want to remind you that those feelings are not from God.

Unfortunately, since sin has entered the world, it's normal to struggle with those negative feelings that cause us to question our worthiness, our sense of purpose. Even some of the most important men and women of the Bible can relate to this struggle.

Remember Moses? The guy who led an entire nation out of slavery and literally heard God's voice? Well, before he started climbing mountains to hang out with God, he struggled with believing in his own ability to fulfill God's purpose for him. In Exodus 3:11, we hear Moses saying to God, "Who am I? How can I go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" We remember Moses as a hero, but even he felt unequipped.

What about Jonah? You know the giant fish story? God told him exactly what his job was, in Jonah 1:1 God says to him, "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are." What did Jonah do in response? Did he pack his bags and march boldly into the mission God called him to? No, verse two says, "But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the Lord." Jonah ran from the Lord, he felt scared.

Let's jump to the New Testament. Surely, Mary the mother of Jesus understood her purpose and carried it out with confidence. In the first chapter of Luke, the angel Gabriel comes to her and says, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary's response wasn't exactly enthusiastic. Luke 1:29 reads, "Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean." Gabriel went ahead and explained God's plan (in detail). But Mary still isn't sure, in verse 34 she asks, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" Mary, standing in front of an angel telling her what God had planned, felt uncertain.

And then there's Paul. We know for certain that Paul wrote 12 of the 27 books in the New Testament. Paul led three missionary journeys with the sole purpose of spreading the Gospel. That same Paul persecuted Christians. Before his conversion, he was known as Saul, and Acts 8:3 tells us he "was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison." Paul himself said in 1 Timothy 1:15, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst." Paul had a past, he felt unworthy.

Many of you are familiar with the stories of Moses, Jonah, Mary, and Paul. And though I've seen a few familiar faces here today your connection to me is mostly through memories of my husband Ben and his family (Tony, Connie, Nikki, and Blake) who lived in Aurora for most of Ben's life.

I grew up across the state line in Kansas. I've gone to church for as long as I can remember. Sometimes, twice in one weekend. Saturday night mass with my mom at the Catholic church and Sunday morning with my dad at the Lutheran church. My parents, married with different denominations, made church an important part of our lives. I attended a Lutheran school where we had memory verses each week, chapel on Wednesdays, and confirmation class during school when we were in seventh and eighth grades.

I've always believed in God and that His son, Jesus, died on the cross to save us from our sins. But it wasn't until meeting Ben, talking about our faith and the significance of a personal relationship with the Lord, and attending a service at this very church, that I realized that Jesus died for ME. Not all of us in general or for humanity as a whole, but for ME. He wanted a personal, unique relationship with ME. That God wanted a relationship not just religion.

And He wants that with you too. The Bible is clear: we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. And if you don't believe that we are born sinful, watch a 1-year-old for a day. I've seen this with every one of our kids. They start to get curious and into things they shouldn't—an electrical outlet, for example. Countless times, I've caught little fingers reaching for an uncovered outlet. No. Owie. I tell them with a serious face, and move their little hands away.

I no more than let go and those chubby little fingers reach out again. No. I say more sternly and give those fingers a little tap. Now, sometimes that's enough, and they move on to explore elsewhere, but more often than not, they'll look up at me with their big eyes and an even bigger grin and reach out once again. Though they don't have the words, their little faces say: You said no but this is fun, I want to do it anyway.

Moms, you know what I'm talking about. We call it a devilish little grin that's often adorable, but in reality, it's a symptom of sin.

We don't outgrow that sin either. Temptation follows us until the day we die. That sin separates us from God, and as a holy and just God, He must punish it. Instead of punishing each of us for the sins we have committed, he sent Jesus (his son) to live on this earth and take our punishment. Jesus took our sins to the cross with him and suffered his father's wrath...for us. He died, was buried, and was raised from the dead so that every sin—past, present, and future—was paid for.

Gossiping about your neighbor...Jesus took that one. Being rude to your husband... covered by Jesus. Losing your patience for the millionth time in one day...Jesus covered that in His blood, too.

All we have to do is accept that free gift of grace. We have to admit that we are a sinner no matter how “good” we look to the outside world or how religious we appear to be. We have to confess that nothing we have done or can do is enough to earn our way into heaven. And as Romans 10:9-10 says,

“If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved.”

And once you are saved, Jesus gives you a new purpose . . . to tell others about Him. To share your story and tell others about the work God has done in your life. And if you don’t feel qualified, don’t worry. You’re in good company.

All throughout the Bible, we see that God used ordinary people, people who sinned, people who felt unequipped, scared, uncertain, and unworthy. But THEIR feelings didn’t stop God from using them for HIS purposes. Because of their willingness to do the work God put in front of them, they fulfilled their purpose to shine light into a dark world revealing the truth about Jesus, the Messiah.

Moses, Jonah, Mary, Paul—they all existed at just the right time for God to use them, despite their feelings about how useful they could be. And the same is true for you.

Your presence matters. Right now in this very moment, you have purpose.

You have been made in God’s image to fulfill your soul’s purpose to serve, worship, honor, and glorify Him in little ways and everyday moments. It doesn’t matter what your job title is. It doesn’t matter if you feel unequipped, scared, uncertain, unworthy, or anything else.

God created you. He decided that you should exist. Not only did He create you, but He loves you so much that He sent His son Jesus to die on the cross for you. And He knows about those feelings that are holding you back, those feelings that weigh you down, making you feel purpose-less.

So, let’s fight back against those feelings. Let’s confront them with the truth of God’s word. When we wonder, what is my purpose? We can get our answer from the One who created us.

If you feel unequipped like Moses, remember the words of Hebrews 13:20-21 and make them your prayer. “Now may the God of peace—who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, and ratified an eternal covenant with his blood—may he equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen.”

God will equip you with what you need to do his will. HE will produce in you good things that are

pleasing to him. The power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to you. Let me say that again: The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to you. Maybe that power gives you the energy to make it through a long day after a sleepless night with a newborn. Maybe it gives you the strength and boldness to tell those around you of God's goodness even in the most challenging season of your life. Through his power, God will equip you with all you need to serve him.

If you feel scared like Jonah and want to run away from what you know God is asking you to do, remember these words that Jonah spoke from within the belly of the fish: "As my life was slipping away, I remembered the Lord. And my earnest prayer went out to you in your holy Temple" (Jonah 2:7).

I have felt like Jonah. When I felt God leading me to pursue publishing a book, I wanted to run. After sending queries out to agents, I sat down on my bed and called my husband. I was a mess. I was crying and felt like I was going to throw up. Not because I was excited, but because I was scared. I kind of wanted to run away like Jonah. I was afraid that God was asking too much of me. I mean, what if God actually opened the doors to write a book? And then, I remembered the Lord. I remembered that it's not so much about what I can do but what God can do through me. It's about bringing Him glory in the work I do.

Maybe you're there right now. Maybe the thing God is asking you to do has you paralyzed in fear and ready to run. It could be a relationship you're afraid of or a major life change. Maybe God is asking you to forgive something or someone or take a risk that feels too big.

No matter what has you paralyzed in fear, remember the Lord. Like Jonah, you can call out to Him, knowing that your prayers reach his holy temple. Even when you don't feel like doing the work God is putting in front of you, you can honor Him by showing up. You can trust that your prayers reach him, and he will give you what you need. It's more about Him than it is you anyway.

If you feel uncertain, like Mary, wondering why God chose you for this task, remember her final words to the angel before he left her, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true" (Luke 1:38).

You don't have to feel ready to do this work God asks you to do, you just have to be willing. Willing to wake up every day and say, I am the Lord's servant and walk obediently into the work he sets before you. Maybe that work is changing diapers, maybe it's changing lives, maybe it's leading a company, maybe it's leading by example. No matter how uncertain you feel about the work ahead of you, you can be certain that God sees your obedience as his servant.

Finally, if you feel unworthy like Paul, ashamed of your past, and sure that God could never use someone like you for his glory, consider these words written by Paul himself, "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them" (Romans 8:28). God will not waste even one sentence of

your story. If you have endured it, He will employ it. You are not unworthy. You are chosen, set apart, loved beyond understanding, and God is inviting you to worship Him for the good he has done and plans to do in your life.

Ladies, I don't know what word or phrase is keeping you from seeing and feeling the purpose God has for you today, but I do know this: There is purpose in every moment, every day, every phase of your life, despite what your feelings say. Even on the days when you feel more like Cinderella than Cinderella.

And you know what? You don't need a fairy Godmother to transform you into a beautiful princess because you have a God who is in the business of transforming hearts and preparing people for His purposes.

Ephesians 2:10 tells us, "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." God has a plan for you right now, in this stage of life, in this very moment to be used for His purpose.

Now, I know what you're thinking: Kelsey, those people you talked about did amazing things for God—parting the Red Sea and giving birth to the Son of God to name a few. But I'm just a stay-at-home mom, retired grandma, nurse, teacher, clerk, secretary, small business owner, fill in the blank. I want to believe God has a purpose for me, but I don't see how what I do every day can be considered work for God.

I get it. I really do. I already had this presentation written and planned when I started feeling those same things. I was standing at my kitchen sink, loading the dishwasher, when I started to think about what a hypocrite I was. You see, there I was preparing to come here and inspire you all, telling you that God has a purpose for you right where you are, but I was struggling to feel and see my own. Folding laundry, doing dishes, changing diapers . . . those things weren't feeling very purpose-full.

As I was moving around the house doing these very things, I felt God whisper to my soul—the one he created to serve, worship, honor, and glorify Him—Kelsey, these are your good works. Right now, in this moment, the good work I have for you is to fold this laundry so that your kids go to school in clean clothes. A little later with my fussy toddler on my lap, opening and closing a book I was trying to read to him, I felt it again: Right now, this is the good work I have for you, to simply sit with your son.

Ladies, God has a path full of good works on which He created you to walk. Sometimes that path can feel small, insignificant, routine, monotonous. Sometimes it can feel big, exciting, and overwhelming. No matter how big or small the work is, when you follow Him in obedience and do the things He sets before you, when you accept his purpose for you despite your feelings, He will use your presence to glorify Him right where you are.

In Matthew 5:16, Jesus says, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Ladies, more than anything, our world needs the light of Jesus right now. Your families need the light of Jesus. The next generation needs the light of Jesus. The people you work with, go to church with, see at the grocery store, ball games, even just in passing—they need the light of Jesus. And they need you.

They don’t need a superstar standing in the spotlight. They need a willing servant who will reflect the light of the Lord despite her feelings that tell her she’s not good enough.

You see, It’s not about the brilliance of your own light, it’s about what God can do when you live out that light. A light that is not reliant on your strength or ability to keep it aflame. It is a light fueled by the power of the resurrection, ignited by the Holy Spirit, and sustained by our God.

You have been made in God’s image. You are loved beyond understanding. And your purpose is to reflect the light of Jesus in all you do. You were created to shine. So stop hiding. Stop shrinking back in fear. Stop worrying about being too old or too young, too loud or too quiet, too inexperienced or untrained. Stop worrying about feeling unequipped, scared, uncertain, or unworthy. Stop searching for purpose and do the work your soul was created to do: to serve, worship, honor, and glorify the Lord right where you are because your presence means there is purpose.