

Teacher's Guide for Living Holy **Theme: Holiness in Purpose**

Life Application:

Learning God's plan and specific purpose for us, and then investing our energies into fulfilling that mission to the best of our abilities.

Key Verse for Meditation:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. – Ephesians 2:10

Focus Scriptures:

Proverbs 3:6; Ecclesiastes 3:1; John 1:19-28; 1 Corinthians 3:6-15; 12:4-11; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Peter 4:10; 1 John 3:16-19

Lesson Key:

As Christians who are set apart for God and dedicated to His service, God “owns” us. We choose to put Him at the center of our lives, recognizing that purpose in life flows out of a core intimacy with God and that a truly meaningful life will be found in fulfilling God's specific plan for us. We commit ourselves to using the aptitudes and skills He has given us in the advancement of His Kingdom.

Introduction:

We have many, many choices about how we will use the few, precious hours of our lives. Even as Christians, there can be a tendency to map out our own lives—to set goals, seek for education, choose life partners, and build associations on our own. However, if we have truly dedicated ourselves to God and set ourselves apart for His use, we must recognize that He has a specific plan for our lives and for how He wants to use us. Rather than pursuing our own paths and simply looking to God for His blessing upon our plans, we should actively seek to determine God's purpose for us, and then invest our energies and focus into fulfilling that to the best of our abilities.

A vision of what God has for us to do is an insight into how we can minister effectively in our world. It is the driving force behind the activity of a holy, dedicated servant of God. Having a purpose is the key to effective ministry. It unlocks our potential for fruitful service, maximizes the talents and gifts that God has given us, and fits uniquely with the life circumstances, challenges, and opportunities that come our way.

Opener Ideas/Activities:

Bring a variety of tools to class. Hold them up one at a time, describing the fact that each has a specific purpose. We would not use a wrench to hammer in a nail, nor a screwdriver to saw a board. God has a purpose for each of our lives and He has “shaped” us to accomplish that purpose. It is important that we find our purpose in life and fulfill our calling. We must not try to do someone else's task; we are suited to accomplish our own. And every tool has a purpose! No designer crafts a tool for no reason. God has a use for each one of us.

A similar point could be made using a variety of sports equipment.

Hold up a sack of sugar. Tell your class that you like desserts—perhaps “Eat dessert first” could be your motto. Most desserts require sugar. However, it takes more than sugar to make a cake. Many ingredients are required. By God's design, a successfully functioning church requires many different

individuals with diverse gifts and talents. We are mutually interdependent—we need each other! We all honor and respect our pastor, but what would the church be like if we had one hundred pastors? Who would sing the solo on Sunday morning? Who would direct the orchestra? Who would unlock and lock the church? Who would greet newcomers? Who would clean the baby room?

Make an acrostic by writing the letters S, H, A, P, E down the left side of a dry-erase board. Explain to your class that at times we may think, I don't have any gifts. I can't... But all of us are given some "gift"—some ministry or function God designed us to perform. He "shapes" us for the ministry He has given us. These all are part of the preparation for our call from God.

Spiritual qualifications

Heat involvement

Abilities/gifts

Personality

Experiences

These equip us to function in the role God has designed for us.

Arrange a number of containers around the room such as cups, mugs, glasses, buckets, etc. Ask your class what these objects have in common. (They are all containers.) Notice that though they are all usable, they all look different. All of us who have devoted ourselves to God for His service are usable vessels, though we may look very different, have different capacities (or talents), etc.

Bring an elk call, a whistle, and a cell phone to class. Use these objects to illustrate that God's call may come to us in different ways. He knows just how to speak to us in a manner we will understand.

On a large sheet of poster paper, create an acrostic using the word "commission" as your starting point. Have students suggest words representing jobs we might be called to do that will fit into the acrostic. For example, the word "minister" might build off the letter M.

Give each student a length of string about one yard long. Ask them to use the string to outline something they could do for God. After a few minutes, go around the class and allow each student to explain what his or her string design represents. Use this to open a discussion about the many different calls God could potentially send our way.

The video clip "Forks" could be an idea for an opener for this topic. Search for the title at <http://sermoncentral.sermonspice.com>.

Have a group of volunteers form a "parade" of people holding an object indicative of their call. Each could tell their name and what God called them to do. Have some historical characters (Mary Slessor of Africa, Hudson Taylor of China, DL Moody, Martin Luther, etc.) along with others who have participated quietly behind the scenes in our work, and some who are currently involved. At the conclusion, ask your group: "What call is the most important?" The answer should be "YOUR call." Big or small, noticed or not, your call—wherever God has placed you and whatever task He has given you—is the most important call of all.

Questions from Student Handout:

1. It is God's will for us to be holy (see 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 7). How will a basis of holiness affect our life plans and purposes?

Our life plans and purposes will spring from a heart and life that has been devoted and

dedicated to God and His service. We will want our plans to be His plans, and our purposes to be His purposes, so that we can glorify Him. Whatever specific role we may fill, God has called us primarily to be holy. Therefore, everything we do—all ambitions, opportunities, and decisions we make—must be measured by the plumb line of God’s holiness, to see if it really is going to lead us in the right direction, or become a hindrance to us.

2. How should we go about discovering what God’s purpose is for our lives? See Romans 12:1-2.

Prayer and consecration are necessary to find God’s will for our lives. Romans 12:1-2 indicates that it is possible to “prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” Discuss with your class the steps that the first part of those verses details:

- o Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God*
- o Be not conformed to this world*
- o Be transformed by the renewing of your mind*

Once we have sought the Lord’s will and devoted ourselves entirely to Him, we need to keep our eyes and ears open for opportunities, and our spirits in tune for some prompting. You may wish to develop the thought that God’s purpose for us will often be evidenced by particular talents or abilities He has blessed us with. We may also watch for the providential leading of God through open doors. There will be a “witness” in our spirits when we are obediently following God’s purpose for us. Your students may have experiences of their own that they would like to share.

It may be appropriate to explain to your students that at many points in our lives, God’s will for us will be to simply be doing what our hands find to do, honoring Him through the small matters of daily living. Our purpose may be to serve Him as a parent faithfully teaching our children about Him, as an employee conscientiously doing our job as unto the Lord, etc. It is possible to be so ambitious about finding some great area of ministry for ourselves that we miss fulfilling the role He has ordained for us right now.

3. In Romans 1:7 and 1 Corinthians 1:2, we read that believers are called to be “saints.” The word *saints* is translated from the Greek word *hagios* meaning “holy; pure.” Elsewhere in Scripture, *hagios* is also translated as *hallowed*. What conclusion can we draw from this with regard to our calling?

God’s call is still the same. Thus, our primary calling or purpose in life must revolve around the basic principle that we are holy, pure, hallowed people. We are not our own—we have been set apart and dedicated to God for His service. Thus, He is the One who maps out our life’s purpose. We read in 2 Timothy 1:9, “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

4. How is life without a goal like a boat without a rudder? (See James 3:4.) What are some other analogies that make a similar comparison?

A boat without a rudder could not be steered in any particular direction, so its movement would not be guided, but involuntary. Similar analogies might be a car without a steering wheel, a hamster in a cage, a ballgame without a referee, a church without a pastor, a classroom of students without a teacher, etc. The point should be made that drifting through life will not help us arrive at the right spiritual destination. We will not accomplish anything if we are simply driven by life’s circumstances.

5. We know that people such as missionaries and pastors have holy vocations—their job descriptions revolve around reaching out to the lost. But what about secular jobs? What are practical ways to make a secular job an opportunity for ministry? See Colossians 3:17, 22-24.

Colossians 3:17 tells us, “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” We can minister through a secular job by offering to pray for coworkers when they face prob-

lems, maintaining a pure testimony, showing sincere interest and love for others, giving God credit when talking about our personal lives, etc.

6. In context of our life's purpose, we sometimes speak of having a "vision," or the "big picture" of opportunities in the Gospel. What are some ways we might be able to develop our vision for the Gospel? Use Proverbs 11:14; 12:15; Matthew 6:33, 7:7-8; 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Peter 4:10 to formulate your answer.

The following steps could be considered and discussed:

- o Seek counsel – Seek advice from mature and godly believers (Proverbs 11:14; 12:15). Ask them to help you pray for wisdom and God's guidance in making your decisions.*
- o Have a commitment – Make God your first priority (Matthew 6:33). Desire to know God's will for your life and purpose to achieve it, laying aside things that might sidetrack you.*
- o Seek God in prayer – Through communion with Him, you will gain His direction (Matthew 7:7-8).*
- o Study – Take time to dig into God's Word (2 Timothy 2:15). Spiritual maturity comes through an intimate knowledge and application of God's Word. Through His Word, God can reveal areas of ministry.*
- o Self-evaluation – God has given you special gifts to use in His service (1 Peter 4:10). The ministry He is calling you to will utilize these abilities and experiences. Watch for opportunities to utilize those skills and talents at the right time.*

Sum up this question by encouraging your students to look around and observe the location where God has placed them. The more we understand our context for ministry, the better we will be prepared to take advantage of opportunities within it.

7. What is the outcome of committing ourselves to fulfilling God's purpose in our lives?

Some thoughts that may emerge in discussion are: We will have contentment and a deep sense of fulfillment. Our lives will have a holy influence on others. We will have God's blessings. These are some of the outcomes we can be aware of here on earth; we may not be aware of souls that are saved and other outcomes that eternity will reveal and reward. However, we understand now that our rewards are eternal in nature; we are building for eternity.

Additional Questions:

Once we understand God's purpose for us (holiness), we can consider our purpose for God. What should be the core purpose of a born-again, sanctified Christian? Why would it be dangerous to begin making major life decisions without defining that core purpose?

Your students may come up with different statements in response to this question, but the main point that should emerge in your discussion is that our determination should be to live holy lives that are pleasing to God, and to continue to learn, grow, and mature as Christians. With that established as the key principle in our lives, we are in a position to seek God regarding the specific details of how and what He would have us do with our lives.

It would be dangerous to begin making major life decisions without defining our core purpose because the natural tendency would then be to lean upon our own reasoning, the input of other people, or our personal desires. When our core purpose is to please God, every decision will be viewed through the perspective of holiness and what He would have us to do.

There is a price attached to committing ourselves to a life of holiness. Matthew 16:24 says, "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." What might be some of the "prices" attached to living a holy life?

Class discussion may bring out several thoughts. It could be established that a holy life will

likely bring criticism and condemnation from the world. (See John 15:19). Also, a holy life is a life of self-denial, because we have been dedicated or set apart to God. To deny oneself is to denounce self, and all that self embraces: our rights, preferences, wishes, opinions, etc. That is not easy to do, yet doing so is where one finds his true self.

What are some characteristics we would expect to see in the lives of those who are fulfilling the call of God upon their lives?

Perhaps you will want to generate a list on the board with your class. Their thoughts may include the following:

- o People with a vision for the Gospel will be people of prayer.*
- o They will be people of action.*
- o There will usually be a sense of enthusiasm, zeal, or excitement about them where the Gospel is concerned, whatever their normal personality may be.*
- o Those of a spiritual mind will sense the anointing of the Spirit of God on their lives.*
- o They will be faithful, dedicated, and persevering in prayer, church attendance, and fulfilling their responsibilities in the work of the Lord.*
- o They will be joyfully subject to the order God has established.*
- o Their enthusiasm and dedication will influence others.*
- o Their lives will bring glory to God.*
- o They will have joy and contentment, rather than anxiety and frustration.*

What might be some telltale indicators that we are losing sight of the purpose God has in mind for us?

The following "tell-tale signs" could be discussed:

- o Failure to prioritize. If we do not sort through and identify what is important and what is not, we will find that spiritually insignificant details will become absorbing or even overwhelming in our lives.*
- o Frequent changes. If we find ourselves frequently changing directions, moving from one enthusiasm to another or confused about what our purpose should be, we probably are following our own inclinations rather than the direction of God.*
- o Unimportant pursuits. If we engage ourselves in all sorts of small things, yet avoid the work of the Lord, we may be neglecting our purpose. While these pursuits may offer short-term gratification, they will ultimately leave us empty inside.*
- o People pleasing. If we try to make everyone else happy, possibly our focus has shifted away from what makes Christ happy and onto doing what makes us feel loved, wanted, or appreciated.*
- o Materialism. When we become absorbed in money and possessions, we obscure a clear vision of God's desires for us, and allow worldly goals and priorities to overcome our desire to be used of Him.*
- o Procrastination. If we continually postpone something God has called us to do, it could be an indicator that we are too busy with other things, afraid of the task, or simply undisciplined.*
- o Spiritual dullness. Apathy toward the things of God such as church attendance or other spiritual disciplines can be indicative of a spirit that is no longer pointing toward God.*

If we recognize some of these signs in ourselves, what can we do to remedy the situation?

If we recognize any of these signs in ourselves, we must turn immediately to God and ask Him to show us the cause and to forgive us for our complacency. We should refresh our consecrations. God is

willing to mend, renew, and restore if we come to Him acknowledging our need. He will give us a restored vision and a purpose to serve Him with all of our hearts.

Most Christians know that their lives will be dedicated to serving God, but sometimes it is tempting to put off a full commitment until a more convenient time (once we finish school, or get a better job or wage, or the family is settled, debt is paid off, etc.). Why do we have this tendency, and why is it dangerous? How should we treat our service to the Lord?

Some of this tendency is human nature; some may be a indication of lack of commitment to God's plan. Putting off doing what God wants us to is dangerous because it will become easier and easier to wait, and harder and harder to do what God wants. Our service to God is a privilege, and we want always to regard it as such.

There is an endless list of “work” to be done for God (sick ones to visit, discouraged ones to encourage, maintenance projects to volunteer for, lost souls to pray for, etc.) and no one Christian could possibly do it all. How can we know which duties the Lord wants us to take on and which ones are for others?

Class discussion should bring out that when we seek God, He will present opportunities and witness to our hearts what He wants us to do. This can be a challenging experience for Christians at any stage of their lives. Maybe your students will have some experiences they could share.

Sometimes God will help direct us toward His purpose by helping us notice an unmet need. Look around you. Are there any people or groups of people whose needs speak to your heart? What abilities might you have that could help meet that group's needs? What might be a first step toward helping these people?

Bible Background:

Greek architecture was a source of pride for the people of Corinth. This is why Paul chose to use a building analogy in 1 Corinthians 3:6-15 to demonstrate the need for the various strengths and gifts within the Corinthian body of believers to complete the Gospel structure.

Christians must work together to further the Gospel, but at some point, our work will be judged individually. The effectiveness and the true nature of every task undertaken for God will be openly displayed. Paul states that “every man's work shall be made manifest.” Three verbs are used to describe this revelation: *declare*, *revealed*, and *try*. To *declare* is to make plain or evident. To *reveal* is to disclose or uncover. To *try* (or test) is to determine whether it is genuine or false.

When our purpose is in fulfillment of God's call on our lives—when we have undertaken it at His direction and through His empowerment and have fulfilled it faithfully to the best of our abilities—we can be sure that it will endure the evaluation of God and we will receive our reward!

Supplemental Resources:

“A Ministry for Everyone” by Bill McKibben, *Higher Way* Vol.88-3

“The Value of a Vision” by Randy Baltzell, *Higher Way* Vol.91-3