

Series: On Purpose

January 1, 2017

## **Title: On Purpose**

**[Slide 1]**

**Text: Romans 8:28-30**

### **Grand Performance**

**Birth of a dream:**

**[Slide 2]**

She stands backstage in a pink tutu, her hair done up in a tight bun. She has whiskers drawn on her face and mouse ears on her head. In just a moment she and her classmates will run out on stage with their hands held up in front of them like little paws.

It's almost time for their backstage monitor to urge them forward – out into the brilliant, blazing lights of center stage. But not quite yet: all eyes are on the principal dancer – an 18 year old in the most beautiful costume that the little girl has ever seen. The dancer leaps and spins. The world stands still.

Look in the little girl's eyes and all you will see is the reflection of the dancer onstage. It's the birth of a dream.

**From there to here:**

Of course, the 18 year old accomplished ballerina was herself a little 4 year old in a pink tutu, with her hair in a tight bun. She, too, had stood with her friends in a nervous line of tiny dancers, waiting for the signal to go out into the brilliant, blazing lights of center stage. She could still remember the birth of the dream.

But it was a long road from there to here! First, there were 14 years of lessons and summer camps. Then there was growing up and learning how to stretch, balance and move a body that kept changing. Add to that a string of injuries that had to be worked through and overcome.

Along the way came the questions: Why am I doing this, anyway? Will I ever be good enough? Why is the teacher so hard on *me*? Will I ever *get it*? Will I be good enough to take a lead role some day? Will the dream come true?

## **Grand Performance:**

Now imagine a much greater performance – the performance that is your and my life in God’s world. Like the 4 year old dancer we find ourselves pushed onto the stage, but without a dress rehearsal. We perhaps catch a glimpse of what could be – of what we are meant to be. Yet along the way things happen and the dream becomes at best a faint, indistinct impression. A song without words.

And like the young dancer we have our questions, our doubts and our fears. Worse, there are those who question or mock our desire to live this dream or any dream.

And yet all along, the God who made this world and everything in it has a purpose for each one of us. It may begin with whiskers and mouse ears, but He sees all the way to the moment when we star in His grand performance.

## **On Purpose**

### **Called:**

This is what Paul is talking about in one of his most famous sayings:

### **[Slide 2]**

*Romans 8:28 NIV*

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Paul says that “in all things God works for the good...according to His purpose.” This does not mean that God causes or wills bad things to happen to us. He doesn’t “give us” cancer or heart disease because disease, suffering and death are part of His purpose for the world. Instead, He takes even the worst things in this world and *turns them* to His purpose.

You and I have been issued a *call* to be part of God’s great purpose. Think of it as being invited to participate in God’s grand performance – the unveiling of His restored Creation. Paul reminds us that – just as we read in the Creation Story in Genesis – this is God’s *work*.

God calls. We love Him in return. As a good Jewish rabbi, Paul knew God's core command to His people:

**[Slide 3]**

*Deuteronomy 6:4-5 NIV*

*"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

This was a Scripture that he recited every day of his life. To be part of God's performance in the New Creation meant first and foremost to be a "God-lover."

Called: God already has chosen you for the part you play in His grand performance.

God-lover: You alone choose to put all of your trust in Him. You make Him the love of your life.

**Transformed:**

So what does it mean to be part of that grand performance? Paul explains:

**[Slide 4]**

*Romans 8:29 NIV*

*For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*

Think back to the ballet performance with the ballerina in the spotlight and the little girl in the mouse ears watching from behind the curtain. What do you think the ultimate goal of the little girl's teacher might be? Wouldn't it be that *she be the ballerina someday?*

The God who created you, *knew* you before you were even born. He already envisioned and in some mysterious way *experienced* a loving Father's relationship with you. He chose you for a role in His grand performance. That role was meant to be one in which you share the stage with His Son.

God's work in us is like that of the ballet teacher: to see us change and be transformed – conformed to the image of His Son. Once again, this is Creation language. We were originally created in God's image. Now God is

working in us to restore the full beauty of His image in us. Jesus is the “firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” We see Him on stage in the spotlight. And when we see Him in His victory over sin and death, we see what God has in store for us.

### **Splendid:**

What God has in store for us is nothing less than the splendor and glory that He intended for us when He made His world. Paul concludes:

### **[Slide 5]**

*Romans 8:30 NIV*

*And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

God saw the whole sweep of human history before it all began. He saw you and me. He chose us for His grand performance in a renewed Creation, regardless of anything sin and death would do.

He issued a call for us to become part of His cast. We were called, as Paul says, “according to His purpose.” His calling you is central to His purpose not only for you, but for the entire grand performance of a renewed Creation as it reflects God’s glory.

He broke into our time with His final verdict: Innocent! He made us part of His family, His people. He justified us.

And then He put us on stage under the lights to shine with His splendor and glory. That’s what it means to be “conformed to the image of His Son.” That was His purpose all along.

### **Your Purpose**

#### **From there to here again:**

Paul writes just a few verses earlier in this passage:

### **[Slide 6]**

*Romans 8:18 NIV*

*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*

With these words he is acknowledging the reality that we live in between the birth of the dream and the full splendor of its fulfillment. Paul had seen with his own eyes the risen Jesus. That vision changed him forever. It was the birth of the dream.

But the path to the dream's fulfillment was filled with what he calls "our present sufferings." Like Jesus, Paul learned that the birthing of God's New Creation comes with the labor pains of suffering in this present world.

Those sufferings, setbacks, difficulties, trials and hardships do not negate God's purpose for us and His world.

### **[Slide 7]**

*Romans 8:28a NIV*

*"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him..."*

Our "present sufferings" are not only no match for God's greater glory, but in a mysterious way are folded into His purposes.

### **Answering "the call":**

Our responsibility is to answer God's call. Our greatest honor is to become God-lovers and members of His family. When we do, He promises to work in our lives so that everything that happens in some mysterious way we become more and more "conformed to the image of his Son."

Answering God's call means daring to believe that the Creator of all things is working out His perfect purpose in you and me. It means that our little stories are part of a much greater story: God's Story.

He writes the script. He choreographs the ballet. We answer the call.

### **Your purpose:**

In the end we make a choice: will I see my purpose as something that I must try to create and make happen? Do I write my own script for my time on this earthly stage? Or am I part of something much more wonderful and splendid?

Is this "all there is"? Or is this just the opening act of God's grand performance?

Does God really know not just who I am, but does He *know me* and love me? Has He always known and love me, even before the world began?

Does He love me enough to work through everything in my life – the good and the bad – so that His purpose comes true?

The curtain is rising. The lights are on. Take your places. The grand performance is now!

## **LIFE Group Lesson for “On Purpose”**

### **Ice Breaker:**

- Tell about something that you dreamed of doing that eventually became a reality.
- What did it feel like when you first had this dream?
- What did you have to overcome?

### **God’s Great Purpose**

- It has been said that *history* is the working out of the purpose that God had for His Creation from the very beginning.
- History is not the story of the world coming back to its original starting point. History is the story of how God renews and restores His world so that it finally fulfills His original purpose for it.
- Everything in all of Creation – in some mysterious way – fits into God’s greater purpose.

### **What about all the bad things in the world?**

- Paul says that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him.
- In all things? How on earth could God use the loss of a loved one, a chronic illness, famines, wars, tornados and earthquakes, plus a host of other terrible things, to make His plan and purpose come true?
- To answer that question, first we must remember that God doesn’t will or create evil in His world. His good Creation has been infected with chaos, sin and death.
- The good news is that God’s *purpose* is greater than all of the forces that would destroy His Creation.

### **What that means for you and me:**

- God has personally called each of us to be part of the remaking of His world. The project, naturally, must start right with us!
- Our response is – in Paul’s words – to be God-lovers. That means being people who “love the LORD our God with all our heart, soul and strength.”

- It means that when the bad things happen to us, we remember that God is still in charge, working out His greater purpose. Thus, God's Purpose becomes our Purpose.

**Share and Pray:**

- What would be an area in your life right now where you need God's help to believe that He truly is in charge and working out His purpose?
- Pray with each other for God's purpose to be supreme as we begin the new year.