

Never Too Young for Purpose

Recently I was in London, working with a team of people who have helped plant a church there. After we spent a day working through some difficult personal issues among the team members, I found myself giving a report, saying that the team was “so young.” The youngest member is 25 and the oldest is 33. Someone who heard me say that reminded me that 25 and 33 aren’t so young, but the older I get, the younger they look! But these “young people” are making a dramatic impact in one of the world’s major cities and they are doing so without a pastor! Each one of them left their own country to start afresh in England and now they are now making their spiritual mark.

Having taught thousands of people all around the world about purpose, I have come to a simple, but profound conclusion: there are no age restrictions when it comes to clarifying and fulfilling your purpose. In some cases, I’ve found children, teenagers and young adults to be much more “in tune” with my purpose teaching than their adult counterparts. In fact, this young generation wants their purpose and they want it *now*. They are not willing, as their seniors were, to spend years paying their dues in a company or ministry in the hopes that eventually they will do something they enjoy that is related to their purpose. They want to know and fulfill their purpose as quickly as possible. Anything less is unacceptable for them.

Take my own two children as examples. At 24 years of age, my son left a decent job in Pittsburgh to relocate to Hawaii. He went without knowing anyone, but he wanted to do something that was more in touch with his artistic side. He got a job as a waiter and for the last three and a half years has been writing and pursuing his passion for photography. He is now ready to leave Hawaii and attend art school somewhere in the United States.

My daughter, on the other hand, went through university, majoring in marketing. Since the time she was a little girl, she knew she wanted to be in sales. At 20, she declared that she wanted to pursue pharmaceutical sales. When she graduated, she got a job with an up-and-coming drug company in Maryland. Today, at the age of 24, she is ranked in the top 10% of her company’s sales reps, even though she is among the youngest.

Both my children heard my purpose teaching many times and both took it to heart. Today they are doing what they love, where they want to do it. And there are many more “young” people who have done and are doing the same.

So I am finding that young people hear what I am saying about purpose and, if they follow my suggestions, will more often than not arrive at a clear statement of purpose. This means that I (and all those who teach the younger generation) must equip youth to understand what price they will have to pay to be a person of purpose. We must also pay more attention to the role of coach and mentor for young people so that they will have what they need to fulfill their purpose.

What Does the Bible Say to Young People About Purpose?

The Bible is a book about purpose. It does not teach people to find jobs. It teaches people to do what God created them to do. With that being the case, the Bible doesn't wait until someone reaches legal age before it talks to them about the will of God. The Bible speaks to everyone, young and old, about finding and doing the will of God. I think any youth program that neglects teaching about purpose is missing the boat, so to speak. For the purpose message resonates in the hearts and minds of young people and those who teach purpose principles are doing a great deal to equip youth for a successful and fulfilling life.

The Bible is full of stories of young men and women who knew and pursued the will of God—their purpose—at an early age. Let's examine some of them to see what we can learn:

1. **Joseph.** Joseph was a teenager when he had his two dreams: “Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them (Genesis 37:2). His brothers sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt, where he spent the next 13 years being prepared to fulfill the dreams that he had. “Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt. During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully” (Gen 41:46-48).

When Joseph was 37, the lean years began in Egypt. Eventually his brothers came and bowed down before him in fulfillment of his dreams during the second year of the famine (see Genesis 45:6). So at 39, Joseph was ruling the world and his family

2. **Moses.** Moses' pursuit of purpose began much earlier than Joseph's for we are told: “Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, 2 and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months” (Exodus 2:1-3). What made Moses so beautiful, so distinctive that his parents were willing to risk the wrath of Pharaoh rather than drown him in the river (remember that all male babies were to be thrown into the Nile by Pharaoh's order – see Exodus 1:16)?

Perhaps they saw God's purpose on their baby's life, which caused them to protect him. Eventually they did comply with Pharaoh's order and “threw” their baby into the river, but not without first fashioning a basket which would prevent Moses from drowning.

Moses' parents must have imparted purpose to Moses, for he had a clear understanding of what he was to do with his life while still being raised by Pharaoh's daughter: “For he supposed that his brethren would have understood

that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand (Acts 7:25 NKJV). While it took another 40 years for Moses to actually be the deliverer he knew he would be, the fact is that he knew his purpose at a reasonably young age.

3. **Samuel.** Samuel's purpose journey began before he was ever conceived, for his mother Hannah "gave Samuel to the Lord" before she even knew whether she could have children: "In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. And she made a vow, saying, 'O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head'" (1 Samuel 1:10-11).

Hannah made good on her vow, delivering her small child to Eli, where he would live in the house of the Lord (see 1 Samuel 1:24). While living there, one night Samuel heard the voice of God: "The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.' Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, 'Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' Then Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening'" (1 Samuel 3:8-10). Samuel progressed from that encounter with the Lord as a boy to be a judge and prophet over Israel.

4. **David.** It's amazing to me that David's family had no use for him, yet most everyone else he came in contact with thought he was brilliant. At any rate, when Samuel came to Jesse's house to anoint one of his sons as king, he could not find the candidate among the sons who were presented: "So he asked Jesse, 'Are these all the sons you have?' 'There is still the youngest,' Jesse answered, 'but he is tending the sheep.' Samuel said, 'Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.' So he sent and had him brought in. He was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, 'Rise and anoint him; he is the one.' So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power. Samuel then went to Ramah" (1 Samuel 16:11-13).

David was the youngest son, presumably a teenager, and God anointed him to be the king. He spent the next 25 years getting ready for the throne and, when he got the crown, he was the greatest king Israel ever had. But it all started when he was helping run the family business as the youngest of eight sons.

5. **Daniel.** Daniel was a young man of great promise, but he was delivered to Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem: "Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and

literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service (Daniel 1:3-5).

Daniel went to Babylonian university and quickly distinguished himself as an interpreter of dreams and man of wisdom. Before long, he was promoted at a young age to be ruler over the entire Babylonian province (see Daniel 2:48-49). From there, Daniel went on to have a distinguished career as a Babylonian official. But it all started when, as a young man, he was chosen to serve in the court of the king.

6. **Esther.** Esther won a beauty contest and was chosen to replace the deposed queen. Most beauty contestants are young women and I would imagine that was the case where Esther was concerned. Esther was beautiful and God used her beauty to position her with the king so that she could save her people from a vindictive genocidal edict. (I have found that many young people at one time or another consider modeling, entertainment and other public expressions of life. They are ambivalent about these careers, however, because of the dubious moral nature of many of those employed in those areas.) Yet, God didn't hesitate to use this beautiful young woman for His purpose.
7. **John the Baptist.** As was the case with Samuel, John's purpose began before he was born. John's elderly parents had tried for years to conceive with no success. Finally an angel appeared to his father, Zechariah, to announce that they would have a son (see Luke 1:13-17) who would be a special prophet. Zechariah did not believe the angel and was mute until his son was born. When Zechariah indicated this son's name would be John, as per the instruction of the angel, his tongue was loosed and he prophesied concerning John's purpose (see Luke 1:67-80).
8. **Mary.** Most believe that Mary was a teenager when Gabriel, a magnificent heavenly being, appeared to her to announce that she would have a child: "The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). The Lord was with this teenaged girl, entrusting her with the job of giving birth to and raising the Son of God. What an honor! God had faith in this young girl, just as He has faith in other young women and men today to do His will.

Mary asked a simple question of how she could be pregnant since they had not had sexual relations, and the angel responded that the Holy Spirit would bring this about. Mary then uttered one of the great lines in the Bible, one that we would all do good to say from time to time: "'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said.' Then the angel left her" (Luke 1:38).
9. **Jesus.** As with Samuel and John, Jesus purpose began to be clarified before His birth. Gabriel gave Mary clear perspective into her Son's life when he said, "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name

Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:31-33). Mary stored these comments and ones made after Jesus’ birth in her heart, undoubtedly sharing them with her Son as He got older. But then we see a short scenario from Jesus’ early life:

When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them (Luke 2:42-50).

Jesus knew He was to be about His Father’s business, which was “to seek and save the lost” (see Luke 19:10). But this awareness started at an early age and from “then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:51-52).

I hope you have the idea by now that God doesn’t respect age when it comes to revealing purpose. He speaks to young people, showing them what He wants them to do. Also notice that the Lord didn’t speak to any of these young people about a career; He spoke to them about fulfilling their purpose—His will for their life. And all of them made a significant impact on the history not only of the church but also of the world.

Here are some lessons that we can learn from these lives, lessons that will help us equip this young generation for effective and purposeful living:

1. **Parents may play a key role.** Moses’ parents, Hannah, Zechariah and Elizabeth, and Mary all played key roles in the purpose of their children. Each parent was shown prior to giving birth what they child’s purpose would be. We need to prepare parents’ to stop thinking about preparing their children for a career and to start preparing them to fulfill God’s purpose, whatever that purpose may be.
2. **Parents may not play a key role.** Joseph’s parent was blind to his purpose. Daniel’s parents were probably deceased or he was separated from them. We have no indication that Mary’s parents knew of Mary’s condition or angelic

visitation. The church must be a place that fosters and nurtures purpose for young people, whether their parents are in the picture or not.

3. **Purpose isn't only applied to church work.** Joseph and Daniel were government officials. David was a world leader. Esther was a beauty contest winner. Mary was a mother. John, Samuel and Moses were professional "clergy." We must overcome the perception that to do the will of God and fulfill purpose, one must be in church work. That is dangerous and restrictive, and will confuse young people who have a sincere heart to serve God but no interest in church work.
4. **It's never too early to start a PurposeQuest.** The PurposeQuest for some began before they were born. For others it started before the age of 10 and for yet others it became clear in their teen years. But we must not have the attitude that someone is only a child or youth and thus cannot know or deal with the issue of purpose. There is no baby or teenage Holy Spirit. There is only one Spirit and He works in every life to reveal purpose. We must not protect or baby young people when God wants to treat them like adults, revealing His will and preparing them to obey it.
5. **Young people can and do hear God's voice.** Just because someone is young doesn't mean that they can't hear from the Lord. We need to cultivate a healthy faith in youth that God wants to and is speaking to them. They need to learn how to keep a journal, recording what they think they hear. We then need to help them find ways to do live the will of God and not just make an economic living. Parents and pastors do not glorify God when they help someone become a doctor when God wants them to be a musician.
6. **Young people need to be prepared for the road ahead.** Once a young person discovers his or her purpose, they then need to understand what God will do in their life to prepare them for purpose fulfillment. We must help young people see what Joseph, David and Daniel went through to do God's will. They must understand that this isn't easy, that purpose is serious business. They need to be young men and women of integrity, learning about such issues as servant-leadership, missions, and humility.
7. **Young people need to see Jesus as a man of purpose.** Jesus didn't accomplish the will of God just because He was divine. He was a man of purpose, who found and fulfilled His purpose just as you and I do. While we study the lives of men and women of purpose, the best model we can have any young person follow is Jesus. Help make Jesus real to the young generation, showing Him to be able to help them with their purpose because He was a man of purpose Himself.

As with most essays on this subject, I expect it to be "open ended." What I mean is that this will continue to be written as we all obtain new insight into this issue. When you see something new concerning a young person of purpose in the Bible, please write me at

purposequest@att.net. As I close, I see Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 1:5), Paul's nephew who saved him from a conspiracy (see Acts 23:16) and Phillip's four daughters who prophesied (see Acts 21:8) as other young people of purpose who have something to contribute to this important topic. Study the Bible with young people, using the people in this paper and others as purpose role models.

If you are involved in youth work, teaching, or raising sons, daughters, nieces or nephews, then I urge you to talk about, study and work on purpose. Use the resources that I have posted at <http://www.purposequest.com> to help young people focus on purpose. Let the Holy Spirit reveal to them why they are here. And as you do, you will learn what I stated at the beginning of this meditation: God puts no age restrictions on purpose, speaking to young and old alike concerning His will. Armed with that understanding, let's work to raise a generation of purposeful young men and women who will do great things for God.