

The STRONG Christian 5
Strong in Purpose: Able to CROSS Carry.

The Christian needs to be strong in Purpose and Resolve. What are you resolving to do for the Kingdom of God? Do you have any resolve? Are you determined to do anything? We can spend most of our life drifting and being determined by our circumstances. God wants to stir up a holy resolve within us. Am I ready for a dedicated determination? In fact, I am never ready because the determination creates the dedication. And there are many forces working against us in formulating our resolve.

Paul had this experience and revelation. In Romans 7, as he describes his struggle with his sin nature he says that he does not know what he is doing because he does not do what he wants to do, and what he does not want to do this he does (Rom 7:15). The problem he sees is sin dwelling within him (7:17). He finds it a (spiritual) law that evil is present when he wants to do good (7:21). He sees a battle going on between the law of sin (in his members) and the law of God (in his inner man). With his mind he serves the law of God but with his flesh he serves the law of sin (7:25).

Paul talks about this experience again in Galatians 5. There he says that the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit (lusts) against the flesh. These are contrary to (antagonistic to) each other so that you may not do what you wish (Gal 5:17). The battle for purpose that is going on within us is seen here as a battle between the spirit and the flesh. Both the spirit and the flesh are spirit principles. We are talking here about the flesh not my flesh. My flesh is not evil because it is created by God. But the flesh, as a spirit principle, desires/lusts/opposes the work and desires of the spirit in the spirit realm. The effect of this is that we do not do what we wish. This is not only an effect, it is an intention of the flesh to hijack our purpose and resolve in God. The problem is the difference between desire and action: what we want and what we actually do. This can also be expressed by the defiled conscience where we are divided between what we say we will do and what we actually do. The person who has got it together can do what they desire. There is an immediacy, a transparency and an innocence in what they do. This desirable state does not happen because of the battle between the spirit and the flesh. Paul says that it is not the case that whatever we desire we do. This can be expressed two ways which look the same but are really different. One way is to say that we do not do what we desire. The other way is to say that we do not desire what we do. This can be expressed as

1. we do not do what we desire
2. we do not desire what we do.

The first expresses a failure in our ability to do what we want. We know what we want but for various reasons (spiritual and psychological) we do not seem to be able to do it. This is puzzling but is a standard experience of the divided person that most of us regularly experience. However, the second seems to be saying something more sinister, that we are doing what we do not want. This suggests that there is a force at work in our life which causes us to do something that we actually do not want to do. Something else is functioning in our being which is a demonic influence. Paul calls it the law of sin.

The point of these remarks is to show the deep struggle we can have in obtaining and performing a purpose for God in our life. Indeed, this can be for any purpose in our life.

It seems to me that purposelessness is a sign of the pagan spirit. Pagans are driven by circumstances, magic, manipulation, sorcery and the domination of their own experience. James describes the wisdom that comes from below as earthly, soulish (sensual, psychological) and demonic (James 3:15). The general cultural appeal of Rick Warren's book 'The Purpose Driven Life' indicates the loss of a sense of purpose in the pagan culture. When one is given over to the pursuit of desire and the experience of what desire promises (the worship of feeling) we strengthen desire to the power of lust or strong desire. Then we are in the thralldom of desire. This is all promoted by the consumer, acquisitive society. Strong desire in itself need not be evil for the spirit also lusts against the flesh (Gal 5:17). But the strong desire of the flesh will war against the strong desire of the spirit creating our inability to act. We can also make having experience our purpose.

Purpose and Experience.

A strong desire (lust) of the flesh is to have experience. Basically and naturally, we live by our experiences. In fact, we live under the tyranny of our experience. We usually judge everything by the experiences we have which, of course, are always limited by time and space and by our actual capacity to process that experience. We process our experiences as a child and as an adult. And the sign of whether we are a child or an adult is the way we process our experiences. The child has to learn the ways of the adult mind. Otherwise they remain childish: a child processor in an adult body. In our culture we can have work experience, sexual experience, painful experience, necessary experience, learning experience and a holiday experience. We can speak from experience and have the experience of a lifetime.

When our purpose is to have an experience, or when our purpose is judged by our experience, then we ultimately lose our purpose as a means of directing our experience. We judge our experience by our experience. We decide for our future on our experience of our past. Fortunately the gospel is not about our experiences and the purposes of God always stand over against us and our experiencing. The gospel is not our experiences but we may minister the gospel by our experiences. The gospel is for healing but there are various experiences of healing. However, because people always have various experiences (different experiences between people and even within the same person) this means that experience itself is no real ground for purpose. We will always experience a chosen purpose. That is how purpose becomes real to a person. So does my experience determine my purpose or does my purpose determine my experience? Ultimately, I must let God be God and make God my God.

The Christian Calling.

The Christian strengthens their purpose by seeing it as a calling from God. This means that the source of the purpose does not depend on our sense or experience of purpose but upon the objective (outside of me) call of God. To be able to (genuinely) say that a chosen purpose is the call of God on my life, places the purpose above our own experience and is a bulwark against negative experience which will always come. Isaiah received a call from God by overhearing God speak in the Temple. After having his personal cleansing experience of the live coal purifying his lips, he hears God saying 'Who will go for Us?' Isaiah volunteers, 'Here am I, send me' (Is 6:8). From then on Isaiah delivers the Word of the Lord, not just his own opinion based on his own experience.

Jeremiah struggles with the call of God that he sensed he received as a child (Jer 1:5). Jeremiah's experiences of bringing the Word of the Lord are negative and intimidating. The Word of God was made to him a reproach and a derision daily (Jer 20:8). However, because the call had a divine origin and was beyond experience, Jeremiah could not resist the force of God's Word in him. God's Word in his heart was like a burning fire shut up in his bones. He was weary of holding it back and he could not (Jer 20:9). The strength of such a call over-rides even the most negative experience. Such a call directs and master-minds experience. If, as we press into God, this call continually presses into us then can we assume that the call is from God and not just from me?

The Call to Carry our CROSS.

An even stronger corrective and direction for experience is the call to carry our cross (Mk 8:34). There are two crosses in scripture. One is the Cross Jesus alone could carry. The other is the cross the disciple carries. So our purpose starts with a desire which becomes an experience, which becomes a call, which becomes a cross to carry. This sequence starts inwardly and ends outwardly. Jesus models Cross-carrying. Cross-carrying is a uniquely Christian experience and teaching. Only the purpose of God could turn such a defeat (crucifixion) into such a victory (redemption). The fact that such a victory is possible is established in the teaching and experience of the Tabernacle. This is not a sudden, magical teaching. Therefore, the only sense that we can possibly get out of the very negative experience of the Cross of Calvary is to look at the life of Jesus Christ.

The Way of the Cross.

I isolate ten marks of cross-carrying which I will list in five pairs as follows:

1. Choice: Baptism / Temptations.
2. Method: Setting face / Ministry.
3. Testing: Gethsemene / Trial.
4. Submission: Nailing / Dying.
5. Glory: Rising / Ascending.

1. Choice: Baptism / Temptations.

Jesus decided from an early age to be about His Father's business (Lk 2:49). Other than His growing up in Nazareth, the next we hear of Jesus is at His Baptism. He has chosen to fulfil all righteousness and submit to the Baptist. At the point of His submission the Holy Spirit appears as a dove and the Heavenly Father speaks. (This is a Trinitarian witness.) Jesus is empowered for His ministry by the indwelling Holy Spirit. He, the Holy Spirit, is the source of Jesus' wisdom, faith, healing and authority as He fulfils the purposes of God for His life on earth. Immediately after the Baptism Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Mtt 4:1). Jesus is not a religious automaton. He has to negotiate His human nature. Jesus Christ Himself has to struggle with evil and demonic forces. In fact, Jesus learnt obedience by the things He endured (suffered, Heb 5:8). Temptation isolates the struggle and pinpoints the spirit victory. Jesus is now committed to His course.

We also have to be baptized into the Christian and cross-carrying life. We also have to face the chorus of temptations that attempt to violate (destroy, twist) our purpose in God.

2. Setting His Face / Ministry.

Luke says that Jesus, when the time had come for Him to be received up, set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem (Lk 9:52).

To set one's face is to show a body language of intense devotion and concentration. Isaiah says that he will set his face like flint and rest in the determination of God (Is 50:7). God is often described as setting His face (Lev 17:10;20:3,5,6;26:17). To set our face is a severe discipline.

Jesus did not come to minister only. As He sets His face for Jerusalem, halfway through His ministry, His purpose is to get to Jerusalem, where a prophet should die (Lk13:33). So He ministers along the way to all those who are brought to Him (Lk 13:33).

3. Testing: Gethsemene / Trial.

The tempting continues. God tests us (1Thess 2:4) but Satan tempts us. Gethsemene seems to be the scene of Jesus' greatest struggle. It is the great trial to stick to the purpose of God for Him. Gethsemene is the inner struggle. Pilate's trial is the outer struggle. Both types of trial are a necessary part of cross-carrying.

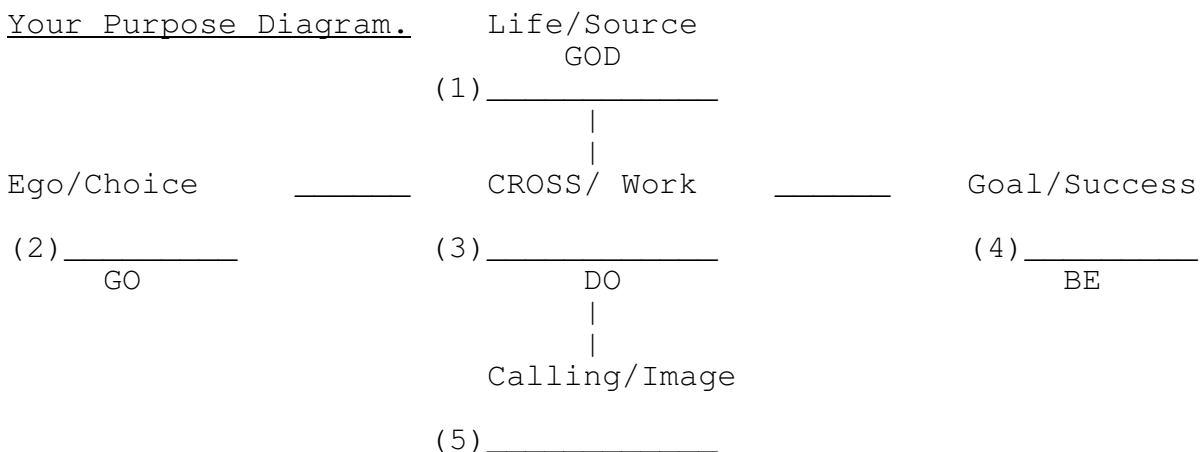
4. Submission: Nailing / Dying.

There was no justice in the trial of Christ. He was deserted by the legal system: Pilate washed his hands of the matter. So Jesus submits to scourging, mockery, desertion and crucifixion. To be crucified is to be nailed to your cross. The cross you choose is the cross you will be ultimately nailed to. It will be how you offer yourself to God. May He receive your offering (Rom 12:1). Nailing is done by others in their time. We cannot crucify ourselves. The ultimate act of submission is dying. Paul says, 'I die daily' (1Cor 15:31). This identification with Christ in His death is also spoken of by Paul as 'carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus' (2Cor 4:10). There is a mystery here about death and the power of dying (not suiciding) that only the disciple of Christ can receive. But Jesus passes through death and, we believe, so does the disciple and follower of Christ.

5. Glory: Rising / Ascending.

All glory belongs to God. Glory is given by and must be returned to God. The person who takes the glory to themselves will be corrupted by it. Jesus is raised by God to the glory of God the Father. Jesus also ascended above every principality and power (Eph 1:21, Col 2:10) and we will reign with Him (2Tim 2:12).

Your Purpose Diagram.



Fill in the 5 spaces:

- 1) How/where do you receive God and His revelation best?
- 2) You are agent. It is your choice. Where will you GO to obey?
- 3) What will you carry for God? How will you work? What will you DO to obey?
- 4) What is your goal? What is your measure of Success? What do you choose to BE to obey?
- 5) What is your calling? What person Image do you serve to obey?