

Living on Purpose

How to Deal with Life's Distractions



“But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.” And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”” Luke 10:40-42 NKJV

Jesus and Martha had an interesting interaction when He visited her home. Martha was understandably putting things in place for the visitors so everyone - including Jesus - would be comfortable; while her sister Mary seemed to be doing nothing, just seated at the feet of Jesus listening to everything He had to say.

If the guests were to score Martha and Mary, Martha would probably be rated higher because of her level of activity and service, yet Jesus called Martha distracted. Martha didn't do anything wrong by working to ensure everything went well for the visitors, but there was a critical point where she missed the real purpose and focus of the meeting which was what Jesus had to share.

The word used for distraction means, “to be over-occupied, too busy, about a thing”. There are many times we go through life distracted - over-occupied with life and its myriad of issues. And in the midst of the distraction we miss out on important cues the Holy Spirit is giving us concerning our lives and things around us.

This series we're looking at 6 keys for living a focused and purposeful life so we don't end up full of activities without tangible results to show for it. We pray that the series will help us re-direct our attention so we put our focus on what really matters.



Day 1 Times, Seasons, Assignments

“To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven... I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied.” Ecclesiastes 3:1,10

The writer of Ecclesiastes made two critical observations regarding divine assignments. First is that there is a season for everything and timing for every purpose. Which means that there are seasons designated to fulfil certain assignments and specific times allocated to those seasons. He also noted that there is a God-given task with which we are to occupy ourselves. This tells us that people aren't the originators of seasons or allocators of times for those seasons, neither are they the originators of their divine assignments. It all starts with God. This means anything done outside of the allocated time, season or God-given task is actually a distraction.

We have established that for there to be a distraction there must be a set path we should walk. But how do we know that path? How do we know what we're to do per time, how do we understand what season we're in so we're not out of sync with God's agenda?

“The Lord says, “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.” Psalms 32:8 NLT

For there to be a best pathway that means there are other alternatives available to us. Which is why the Lord's promise is critical. He is the one that can guide us along His best for us, the only condition being that we obey Him as He does so. God gives assignments but because we have free will, we can choose not to go along His pathway. If we're honest many times we've already decided what we want to do and just ask God to bless us along the way. But that's not how we're supposed to live.

Each day is pregnant with purpose, every day is meant to yield fruit. Whether that fruit resonates in eternity or not depends on whose purpose we spent the day fulfilling. May our lives be filled with fruitfulness and not empty activities.

Prayer: Lord You have a plan for me and You have promised to guide me through it. Reveal Your plan to me so I can walk in Your ways.

Day 2 Stewarding Time Well

“The Sovereign Lord has given me his words of wisdom, so that I know how to comfort the weary. Morning by morning he wakens me and opens my understanding to his will.” Isaiah 50:4 NLT

There’s always a purpose for every 24 hours we get to experience and we will do well to know what the priority for the day is. Oftentimes we can go through an entire day full of activity, yet unable to pinpoint specific tangible results for the day. This will be a daily occurrence for us if we do not take the time to gain clarity on what the day’s objective is, write it down and stick to it.

“Then the Lord answered me and said: “Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it.” Habakkuk 2:2

There is something about writing our priorities for the day that forces us to engage with what we have put down. Ideally this exercise should be done early in the morning as it will help give a structure to our day that we can work with. When we know what must be done, it becomes clear what activities we engage in that are actually distractions.

“Jesus replied, “Now is not the right time for me to go, but you can go anytime.” John 7:6 NLT

When Jesus’s brothers were going to Judea for a festival, they wanted Him to go along with them but Jesus’s response was quite instructive: He didn’t go because He knew the timing wasn’t right. The festival wasn’t on His priority list and would have been a distraction even though it was okay for His brothers to go. This tells us that we don’t all have the same priorities – which is fine, so long as each of us knows what our individual priority is and don’t form the habit of just going with the majority as the majority may not have the same assignment.

When we seek clarity on what our daily priority should be and walk in what we sense, it becomes clearer to us what the purpose for the period should be. Even if we don’t have a sense of what the Lord is saying daily, we must learn how to be good stewards of time otherwise we will still struggle to fulfil purpose.

Prayer: Lord reveal the assignment for today to me and help me form the discipline of stewarding time well.

Day 3 Retreat & Refocus

“And He said to them, “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while...”
Mark 6:31

When Jesus visited Martha and Mary, it's important we understand that Martha didn't do anything wrong. The guests in her home needed attention so she was dealing with what was right in front of her at the time. However pausing to listen to Jesus would have helped Martha deal with not just her present but also her future. Many times we are like Martha in that our focus on the now clouds our ability to reshape our priorities and strategies to prepare for the future.

“He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.”Psalms 23:2-3

Honestly, now is important, urgent and is almost screaming for attention, hence it's critical we step away from this urgency, otherwise we get locked in an unending cycle of motion without real progress. This is what a daily quiet time is meant to help us address. Whether it's one day or just a few hours, we need to press pause and intentionally spend quality time with the Holy Spirit. At a minimum we achieve two things when we do so: strength for the Now and direction for the future.

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.” Jeremiah 1:5

When we see from God's perspective, we understand that whatever is happening now (good or bad) is actually temporary. What won't change is the reason God put us here and His plans for us. Every experience forms part of our development process of becoming who God created us to be, but we can delay our progress if we don't have the right perspective of what that situation is meant to achieve. Mary understood the key objective of Jesus's visit was impartation, not activity. What's God's key objective for your prior experiences and current situation? Have you asked Him what you're meant to be doing at this time? Or are you locked into a cycle of doing what you've always done? Take some time to retreat and gain clarity.

Prayer: Lord what should be my focus this period?

Day 4 Good or God?

'David rose to his feet and said: "My brothers and my people! It was my desire to build a Temple where the Ark of the Lord 's Covenant, God's footstool, could rest permanently. I made the necessary preparations for building it, but God said to me, 'You must not build a Temple to honor my name, for you are a warrior and have shed much blood.'" 1 Chronicles 28:2-3

David had a good intention to build a temple for the Lord and Nathan the prophet also agreed with him when it was proposed (2 Sam 7:3), however, the Lord had a different plan. It's possible for us and others to be convinced that we know just what to do with a desire we have. So we put in a lot of energy, undertake analysis, make investments etc. to achieve the outcome we are looking for. Yet we may be totally off God's plan.

'There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death.' Proverbs 14:12

If David had gone ahead to build the temple, all of Israel and beyond may have applauded him however, David would have been outside of God's plan. His assignment was simply to provide the materials Solomon would use to build and encourage others in Israel to do likewise (1 Chron 29). Once David knew this, he was able to focus his energy and resources accurately.

David's desire to build the temple came from God, but he needed to clarify his role in its execution. This is instructive as it tells us that it's important we ask the Lord what we're supposed to do with the desires we have and not presume we know what to do. This where our walk with the Holy Spirit comes in as we engage Him daily and are willing to follow His guidance so He can lead us to both physical and spiritual productivity.

'... nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.'" Luke 22:42

God's plan for us is for us to walk in accuracy and not trial and error. This is why we have the gift of the Holy Spirit who will lead us as far as we're willing to go with Him, He won't force us. Let's choose to move by His help so we don't lose valuable time and other resources in the process.

Prayer: Holy Spirit please help me seek You first in all things so I consistently walk in accuracy and purpose.



Day 5

Discernment vs Experience

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. John 16:13

There's information that the Holy Spirit makes available to our spirit, but sometimes we don't take advantage of this information because we're focused on taking actions based on our prior experiences. When we are faced with situations, our default response understandably may be to do what has worked before, either for ourselves or for others. But we're not supposed to live based on what worked yesterday rather we should ask the Holy Spirit what He's saying now.

"The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt, but do as I tell you." Genesis 26:2

When there was a famine in the land Abraham went to Egypt, so when Isaac encountered famine he wanted to rely on the previous experience of his father, but God instructed him otherwise and Isaac not only survived, he thrived more than he probably imagined he could. Experience is important and it's a useful tool for decision making, but it shouldn't override God's current instructions to us. Had Isaac gone to Egypt he may have survived and done reasonably well, however he would have been distracted from God's plan. In periods of crisis (personal, economic, political, etc) it's tempting to look at what worked before or seems to be working for other people (especially if they appear to be thriving) and rely solely on that rather than ask God what His specific instruction is for us.

The Holy Spirit is our guide through life, He knows what's to come and how best to prepare and position us for it. As we seek Him daily and ask Him what we should be doing per time, we're better able to discern what we should be doing at each point so we're not focusing our energies on things that will take us in the wrong direction. Experience is great, but the Holy Spirit's direction is the best.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me a discerning heart. Help me to perceive what you are saying per time so I don't rely on myself or others to show me what to do.

Day 6

Understand the Assignment

“And then he told them, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone.” Mark 16:15

A loved one you respect is going on an extended journey; while away that person wants you to look after some things that belong to him and has called you to a meeting to discuss these things. It's likely at that meeting he will go straight to the point to tell you about the things that really matter to him so you can give those things your full attention. Likewise with Jesus. He's left us in charge of the thing that matters most to Him: the souls of people.

“You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and I have appointed and placed and purposefully planted you, so that you would go and bear fruit and keep on bearing, and that your fruit will remain and be lasting...” John 15:16 AMP

Everything Jesus does is ultimately to fulfil the objective that people receive salvation and are taught His ways. So He places us in specific places to the end that we will function there as representatives of Jesus, bringing glory to His name and drawing people to Him. This is the fruit He's expecting.

Some may be pastors with pulpit ministries, but the vast majority of us are meant to preach with our lives and the love we show. When we understand that the ultimate goal of anything we do is to bring people to Christ, then we cannot but be very intentional about our actions. Each day we will seek the help of the Holy Spirit both to live in a way that pleases Him and to receive creative strategies to draw people to Him because we can't succeed in either in our strength alone.

In understanding, we will also recognize that we are stewards and not owners of all the resources Jesus gives us and we will give an account of our use of those resources. So we will not be frivolous, rather understanding the assignment keeps us motivated to stay focused and on track so that Jesus will be pleased with what we present to Him.

Prayer: Lord help me key into the assignment you've given all your children because in doing that I know you will show me my specific role. I ask for grace to stay focused on what really matters and not live a distracted life.



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