



PURPOSE VS. PREFERENCE: How do I start wanting what God wants? Facilitator's Guide

OUTREACH

🎯 OVERVIEW:

Christ's followers are called to be the salt of the world, but too many people who call themselves "Christ-followers" haven't caught the vision of this purpose. They fall in the category of tasteless salt: "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet," (Matt. 5:13). That's pretty terrifying as far as metaphors go, and it's a clear reminder that we need to align our purposes to God's purposes, and quickly. This lesson will explain the importance of choosing to align our purposes with God's purposes through the stories of Zacchaeus and a guy named Henry Guinness. Both of these men had incredible opportunities to live selfish lives, but instead they chose to find fulfillment in following the purpose of God.

? OPENING QUESTIONS:

- What's your favorite thing to do in the world? Why?
- Is there anything so important to you that you'd give up doing that thing for the rest of your life for it? Why or why not?

💬 WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT IT:

There are a lot of things to want in life. In fact, there are so many that we often categorize a lot of the things we want as things we "deserve": I deserve to be paid well, or to have a car, or to have my weekends free for hangout time. I deserve to have a new wardrobe every season, to have good friends. But truthfully, these things are just wants. They are preferences that drain a lot of our time, money, and attention. Checking things off our list of "wants" and "deserves" can be a full-time job, keeping us from actually getting around to living out the purpose that Jesus has for our lives.

The thing is, becoming a true follower of Jesus involves aligning your desires, the things you want for yourself, with Jesus' desires for your life. To become a rooted disciple of Jesus, you should always be aligning your plans and motivations with his mission for the world. This may require a major overhaul of the way you're currently living. That may not sound fun, but it's the right thing to do. In his book *Jesus' Plan for a New World*, Richard Rohr puts it this way: "We cannot say, 'Thy Kingdom come' unless we are willing to say, 'My kingdom go.'"¹ What we expect to happen, what we think we deserve, and what we plan to do may not always align with God's purpose. But don't get too down about sacrificing these "best laid plans." God's desires are far better than what we think we deserve. Our purposes are temporary; his are eternal.

This seems to be true of Zacchaeus. He was a tax collector, which was a pretty sweet job at the time. All he had to do was betray his fellow Jews and overcharge them for their taxes, and he could have all the status, power, and wealth he ever wanted (nevermind that it also made people hate him). Yet when Zacchaeus heard about Jesus, he realizes that Jesus' way is preferable to his own desires. As you read about Zacchaeus, pay attention to how Zacchaeus made a choice to follow God's purpose by going out of his way to get to Jesus, publicly





acknowledging Jesus, and repenting of his former, selfish life. (Let's be honest: it's not cool for a powerful community leader to climb a tree in order to get Jesus' attention.) This would have been career suicide, but Zacchaeus didn't care. He knew that his comfortable life and status were less important than the purpose Jesus called him to.

Read: Luke 19:1–10

Discuss:

- If you were in Zacchaeus's shoes (okay, maybe sandals), would you have been willing to embarrass yourself and give away your wealth to follow Jesus' calling?
- Does Zacchaeus's choice surprise you? What do his choices reveal about the difference an encounter with Jesus can make?
- What are some of the things you want for your own life that may be a bit selfish?
- What are some of God's purposes for your life?

LEADER'S NOTE: It's important for students to know God's purposes in order to make changes in their lives that reflect God's desires. Here are a few verses that point out some of God's purposes. To go deeper, it may be helpful to have students look up these references and report to the group their findings about what God wants:

- Matthew 28:19–20
- 1 Thessalonians 5:12–18
- 1 Corinthians 10:31
- John 6:38–40
- 1 Corinthians 6:19–20
- Micah 6:8
- Mark 12:30–31
- Matthew 6:33
- Mark 8:35

*** A SECOND LOOK:**

Henry Grattan Guinness had it made. His grandfather founded a brewery in Ireland (yes, that brewery), and the business made the Guinness family quite wealthy. When he was a young man, Henry was offered a position at the brewery. If he had chosen to take it, his future would have been secured in the family business, and he could have been very successful. But Henry had another idea. He wanted adventure. He wanted to go to sea. At the age of 17, he found work as a midshipman on a boat. But during his adventure, something cool happened. He joined an even greater adventure: he started following Jesus. This meant another change. While he wanted to keep seafaring, he now knew that his purpose in life was something more important. So, Henry got to shore and went to work as a preacher, traveling around Ireland. His preaching was dynamic, and people invited him to give sermons all over the world. Meanwhile, Henry and his new wife could barely make ends meet.

Henry could have been rich. He could have asked his family for financial support or gone to work for the family business. Or he could have stayed at sea. He preferred the adventure of the ocean to staying landlocked. But after encountering Jesus, these selfish desires weren't as important. He had a purpose to which he became totally committed. So, he followed God's calling: to preach the good news of Jesus, to teach God's truth against the atheism of his day, and to equip missionaries to spread Jesus' message around the world.²



Discuss:

- Henry Guinness had many enticing options for his life: a great job and wealth, or a life of adventure at sea. But he decided to follow the call to share God’s love with the world. If you had these options, which do you think you would choose? Why?
- Henry left his life of adventure on a ship, but the rest of his life wasn’t exactly boring. Is it possible to follow God’s purpose and still have an adventure? How? Do you know anyone who has?
- If you had to explain the difference between God’s purpose and our preferences to a six-year old, how would you do it?



RATE IT:

Give yourself a 1 to 5 rating. Are you living out God’s purposes or your preferences?



LIVE IT OUT: Purpose Venn Diagram

1. Take a look at the handout and spend a few minutes filling in the section titled “What I Do in a Typical Week.” List as many things as possible.
2. Now take a few minutes to place the items you listed in the section above in each appropriate circle. Ask yourself, *How much of what I do in a typical week is because I want to do it? How much of my time is spent doing something that other people want me to do? How much of my time is spent doing things that God wants me to do?* If an activity fits into more than one circle, put it in the sections that overlap both or all three circles.

Examples: Playing video games probably goes in the “What I want” category. Going to school might go in the “What other people want” category. Youth group might fit into the area where all three circles overlap: “What I want,” “What other people want,” and “What God wants.”

3. As you fill in the chart, note approximately how much time goes into each activity, and write it next to the activity. When you’ve finished thinking through your week and writing things in each section, add up how much time is spent doing things in each circle.

LEADER’S NOTE: Colossians 3:23 is a verse written to slaves who had no choice but to do what their masters directed. It’s a great verse for helping students understand that even though something you have to do may not seem holy (like cooking a meal or homework), the way in which you do it can be glorifying to God. That’s what he wants more than anything. Not everything we do seems holy, but for many activities, that depends more on how we do them.

“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,” (Col. 3:23).



Discuss:

- Which section includes the most activities?
- Are you spending most of your time doing things that you want to do, that other people want you to do, or that God wants you to do?
- Is there overlap between what you want and what God wants? Is there overlap between what other people want you to do and what God wants you to do? If not, why not?
- God doesn't want us to be miserable. That's why it's important to find ways in which our passions fit into God's larger plan. What changes can you make so that more of your time and activities go into the overlap between the "What I want" and "What God wants" circles?



APPLY IT:

Write down one change you are going to make this week so that more of your time and focus can be found in the "What God wants" circle.

Be specific:

What are you going to do?

When are you going to do it?

Is there someone who can keep you accountable?

LEADER'S NOTE: Whenever students make applications, challenge them to be specific. It's one thing to say, "I'm going to trust God more." The truth is, our students won't really know if they did this, or if they grew in trust over the week. It's another thing to say, "Every morning this week before I eat breakfast, I'm going to tell God that today is his and that I trust him, and I'm going to ask him to give me the strength to replace worries with trust." Challenge your students to answer the questions under the "Be Specific" section. You can even have them pair up, share their applications, and ask for accountability from their partner.



THINK ABOUT IT:

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called," (Eph. 4:1).

"The will of God is not something you add to your life. It's a course you choose. You either line yourself up with the Son of God...or you capitulate to the principle which governs the rest of the world." - Elisabeth Elliot³

***Any reference within this piece to Internet addresses of websites not under the administration of LeaderTreks is not to be taken as an endorsement of these websites by LeaderTreks; neither does LeaderTreks vouch for their content.

¹ Richard Rohr, *Jesus' Plan for a New World: The Sermon on the Mount* (Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 1996), 33.

² Timothy T. Larsen, Mark A. Noll, *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2003).

³ Elisabeth Elliot, quoted in Matthew Terrill, *Total Surrender: Living a Life Fully Trusting God* (Victoria, BC: FriesenPress, 2014), 57.



LIVE IT OUT: *Purpose Venn Diagram*

WHAT I DO IN A TYPICAL WEEK

