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What Is God's Purpose for Your Life?

Movies That Inspire

It's a Wonderful Life

Smurfs: The Lost Village

On occasion (or often), you may ask yourself, *What is my purpose in life? What is God's purpose for my life? What am I doing? Why am I doing it?* This may especially happen when you're exhausted and stressed.

These questions arise in movies too, such as in Frank Capra's masterful *It's a Wonderful Life*, in which God uses an angel-in-training to help George Bailey understand his purpose, and *Smurfs: The Lost Village*, in which Smurfette finds that giving her life for others (and being resurrected) is her purpose in life.

If you turn to God's Word, you'll find it has some encouraging news. While some people in the Bible (like Moses and David) received step-by-step instructions from God, most of us don't. But He does give us an incredible plan for our life, which we can find in 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18.

Before we get into that Scripture, though, let's look at John 10:10. Jesus says that the thief comes to kill, steal, and destroy, but that He came to set us free and give us an abundant

life. Think about it—an abundant life. What does that mean?

For George Bailey, a more abundant life didn't mean traveling the world and becoming rich and famous, but it did mean rescuing the Savings and Loan (to help others have an abundant life) and having a wonderful wife, family, and friends. For Smurfette, a more abundant life didn't mean becoming the town grouch or getting a name that identified what she did; rather, it meant warning the lost village of Smurfs and giving up her life to save them from the evil wizard.

Now back to 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18. When my first son, Peirce, was only a few years old, I was preaching on this passage and thought, *What do I want for my son out of his life? Do I want him to follow in my footsteps and go to Dartmouth College and Cambridge University and do all the things I've done? Do I want him to go to New York University School of Law and practice law?*

That was when I realized that I want for him (and my other two sons and daughter) what God wants for us: “Always be happy. Never stop praying. Give thanks whatever happens. That is what God wants for you in Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 ICB). I wanted (and still want) my children to be happy, to talk to me (and they usually do—most of the time), and to have an attitude of gratitude so they can appreciate those around them and what God has done in their lives.

Now look at how the passage ends: “That is what God wants for you in Jesus Christ.” No other place in the Bible tells in such clear words what God's will is for us: to be happy, to talk to Him, and to be grateful. What a wonderful plan for our life!

For George Bailey, God's will was for him to have an attitude of gratitude by realizing he had a “wonderful life.” For Smurfette, God's will was for her to have an attitude of gratitude for

being created to do something no other Smurf could do. So, in a fallen world with trials and tribulations, “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

You will then discover that yours is a wonderful life.

Film to Faith

Watch one or both of these movies:

- *It’s a Wonderful Life*
- *Smurfs: The Lost Village*

Ask:

- How did each hero or heroine discover God’s perfect will for their life?
- How did they talk to God?
- How did they hear God?
- How did they: Rejoice? Pray? Give thanks?
- How can you put into practice God’s will for your life?
- How do you: Rejoice? Pray? Give thanks?

Father, I rejoice when I recall all the good in my life. I ask you for direction in fulfilling your will for my life, and thank you for the blessings you bestow on me in Jesus Christ's name by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Looking Ahead

Do you need strength for all you have to do and want to do? See the next devotion.

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The Joy of the Lord Is Your Strength

Movies That Inspire

Sing

Les Misérables (mature audiences)

Squanto: A Warrior's Tale

Do you need strength for all you have to do and want to do?

Nehemiah 8:10 says that “the joy of the LORD is your strength.” And we all need strength. I need it quite often—when I’m trying to excel, when I’m doing my work, when I’m writing movie reviews, and when I’m talking to studio executives in Hollywood.

In the wonderful animated family movie *Sing*, a koala named Buster Moon needs strength to put on a singing competition to save his failing theater. In *Les Misérables*, Jean Valjean needs strength to escape his past and live a transformed life so he can raise orphaned Cosette. And in *Squanto: A Warrior's Tale*, the Pilgrims need strength to survive in the dangerous wilderness of the New World.

In the case of the remnant of Jews, who returned from captivity in Babylon and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, they needed strength to overcome their fear after Ezra read the Law that God had given them, which they realized they had failed to keep. So Nehemiah offered them

joyous strength.

Just where do we find the strength that flows from real joy? By doing what Jesus called us to do.

Now Jesus called us to do a lot. He called us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:39). He called us to love God with all our heart, mind, and soul (Matthew 22:37). He also called us, as Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 11:23–27, to remember Jesus’ redemptive sacrifice for us by partaking in communion and giving thanks for his death and resurrection that delivered us from the shackles of sin. Paul is telling us to give thanks for the fact that Jesus Christ set us free.

I do thank Jesus! He set me free from a debauched lifestyle. I grew up in the entertainment industry without the knowledge of His love, forgiveness, and ultimate freedom, but Jesus set me free in a day, and I’ve never looked back.

The early Greek-speaking Christians called communion the “great thanksgiving” or the *Eucharist*. I love this Greek word because it’s made up of three little words, kind of like nesting dolls. Inside the act of Eucharist (or “thanksgiving”) is the Greek word *charis*, which means “gift,” and in the heart of the word *charis* is the Greek word *chara*, which means “joy.”

In other words, the strength of the “joy of the Lord” is found in thanksgiving, not in weeping about what you didn’t do, as the Jews were doing in Nehemiah. The strength of the “joy of the Lord” is a gift you get when you’re giving thanks that Jesus did what you could not: He fulfilled the law to set you free.

This is the joy that Buster found when he heard the shy elephant girl singing “Hallelujah.” It is the joy that Jean Valjean found when he gave thanks for the bishop showing

him the love, mercy, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ and when he thanked God for Cosette. And this is the joyous strength that the Pilgrims found when they celebrated the first Thanksgiving with their Native American neighbors.

Where can you find the “joy of the Lord” that gives you the strength to do all that God has called you to do? By giving thanks for Jesus’ death and resurrection on the cross, which set you free to live a more abundant life. This is a wonderful gift that Jesus tells us to do as often as we eat and drink.

Do you need strength to face today and tomorrow? A good place to start is to give thanks to receive the “joy of the Lord,” as we do as believers in the “great thanksgiving.”

Film to Faith

Watch one or more of these movies:

- *Sing*
- *Les Misérables* (mature audiences)
- *Squanto: A Warrior’s Tale*.

Ask:

- How did each hero discover real joy?
- How did each hero discover the joyous strength of thanksgiving?
- How can you put into practice giving thanks to God to receive the gift of the “joy of the Lord” that is your strength?
- How did you receive the gift of freedom and abundant life from Jesus Christ?
- How are you living in thanksgiving?

Father, I give you thanks for everyone and everything in my life, and for all the blessings you have bestowed on me [list some of these blessings] in Jesus Christ's name by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Looking Ahead

Do you love to tell your friends about your favorite sports team, movie, and/or friend?

See the next devotion.

3

Go and Tell the Greatest Story

Movies That Inspire

God's Not Dead 2

Amazing Grace

Do you love to tell your friends about your favorite sports team, movie, and/or friend? Most of us like to talk about what we love. For me, having been saved by Jesus Christ from the depraved entertainment-industry lifestyle, I love to witness about His grace that set me free.

But it was not always this way. In the beginning of my journey with Jesus in the mid-1980s, I found witnessing difficult, as many Christians do. “Doing church” was more appealing to me—going from one worship service to another and then even seminary.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus, before ascending into heaven, tells his disciples, “ ‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses’ ” (HCSB). He doesn’t say “you *could* be,” “you *should* be,” or “you *might* be My witnesses”; Jesus proclaims, “You *will* be My witnesses.” He then continues, “ ‘in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ ” Just a few days afterward, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, their signal that they should go and witness “to the ends of the earth.”

God doesn’t give His disciples much choice here. When filled with His Holy Spirit, we

will witness about His good news to the world. That is Jesus Christ's final instruction to us.

So did the disciples immediately set out to get to the sometimes hard, sometimes scary work of witnessing? No. They hung around the temple in Jerusalem for the next seven chapters. It wasn't until Acts 8:1 that they went to do what Jesus called them to do. Instead, they responded as if the temple were still the center of their faith, and they didn't believe they had the power for the work God had given them. It took the persecution that begins in Acts 8 to wake them up, when they're driven into Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, except for the apostles.

God is omnipotent, or all-powerful, so He could have stopped the persecution. He is also omniscient, so He could have warned the believers. But He did neither. One can only conclude that because the disciples wouldn't do what He told them to do, God allowed the persecution. He let them be driven out of Jerusalem.

This handful of disciples began turning the Roman Empire right side up, from the most wicked and cruel kingdom to a civilized community of law that even finally abolished the evil entertainment of the gladiatorial games. The disciples were filled with power to be Jesus Christ's witnesses. It wasn't the power of man; it was the power of God for the work of witnessing.

God deserves all the praise. The disciples didn't have to change anyone. Only the Holy Spirit can change hearts. As His disciples, we merely need to obey Jesus' commands and tell the greatest story ever told. God will empower us to do it.

Consider what happens in the movie *God's Not Dead 2*. Grace Wesley (played by Melissa Joan Hart), a public school teacher, keeps her faith to herself until she's asked a question by a student. This demands an honest answer about Jesus, who she notes turned the other cheek

and gave His life for other people. After responding honestly, Grace faces severe persecution and has to find the power of God's grace to stand up and witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the movie *Amazing Grace*, William Wilberforce comes to Jesus Christ and is transformed from a bon vivant into an amazing Christian who soon goes to ask John Newton if he should remain in Parliament or become a pastor. Newton tells Wilberforce that his ministry is in Parliament. By staying in Parliament, Wilberforce faces severe opposition, but even so becomes one of the greatest witnesses to the truth of the gospel.

Jesus tells us we will be empowered to be His witnesses. How? By humbly trusting Him and asking the Holy Spirit to empower us to witness. Jesus knows what He's called us to do, and He will give us the power we need through the Holy Spirit to do the work He commissioned.

Trust, and then tell everyone the good news that Jesus Christ came to set everyone free to live an abundant eternal life with our divine Creator.

Faith to Film

Watch one or both of these movies:

- *God's Not Dead 2*
- *Amazing Grace*

Ask:

- How did each hero or heroine find the power to witness?
- How did they witness to Jesus Christ?
- How did they overcome opposition?
- Whom did God transform with their witness?

- How have you been empowered to witness to the greatest story ever told?
- What has happened when you witnessed?

Father, I love you and thank you for forgiving me and transforming my life. Sometimes I don't go forth to tell others about your good news. Please have your Holy Spirit empower me to go into all the world to be your witness. In Jesus Christ's name, amen.

Looking Ahead

Do you contemplate the dichotomy between your thoughts and your physical person? See the next devotion.