

“What’s On Your Highlight Reel?”

Luke 24:13-34

Series: Find Your Purpose with GPS Week 5. Story

The Woodside Church

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In our current series Find Your Purpose with GPS, we are using a special assessment to explore three dimensions of our lives: our Gifts, Passions and Story. Taken together these three not only reveal how each of us is uniquely crafted by God but also how we are uniquely called by God for a purpose in His Kingdom work. Each week we get more unique. Your Gifts – such as serving, teaching, evangelism, music – may be shared with many other disciples. We get more focused when we look at Passions. There’s a smaller group who are interested in addressing homelessness, recovery, the environment, foster children, unbelief. Now we reach the most unique, individual, one-of-a-kind part of you – your Story. Nobody on earth, no one in history, has the same story as you. Your life is not a random accident. Jesus, the Author of Life (Acts 3:15), is writing your story. David, in reflecting on his life says,

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Psalm 139:16

For now, let’s leave aside the theological debate about predestination and providence and focus on this truth: just as God is the author of Scripture – the greatest story ever told – He is also the author of your life story. He writes the Old Testament, the New Testament and the You Testament. And just as you can learn the most important truths from reading and studying what God wrote in the Bible, you can also make incredible discoveries if you review what God writes in your life story.

These days, if you miss a football game, it’s possible to go on YouTube and watch the highlight reel. It contains all the key plays, the highs and lows, the turning points of the game without the commercials. What if you paused, looked back over your life, and reviewed your highlight reel – both the joys and sorrows, the successes and failures? If indeed God is the author of your life story, you will start to see how the Lord is working through the low and highlights. Please understand – God does not write tragic episodes into your story. These happen to us because we live in a broken world. In looking back our purpose is to watch what God was doing in the highs and lows, how He used these events to shape us, how He brought good out of them. In Genesis, Joseph faced abuse, betrayal, enslavement, false accusations and imprisonment. And much of this was caused by his own family. Yet when he rose to the top of power in Egypt he didn’t seek revenge against his brothers. Instead he told them,

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. Genesis 50:20

Joseph looked back over the highlight reel of his life and saw how God used both the blessings and the brokenness in his life to shape him for a unique calling which saved his family and whole nations from starvation. Today we are blessed to hear how one of us, Roz Salgado, found her calling from God. Her GPS journey started in the darkest chapter of her story.

***Roz:** I know you’re asking me about where God has called me, but I feel like it’s really important for me to first start by telling you what happened when I heard God’s call but I resisted. I was on a worldly path before I turned 40. What I mean is that, I was focused on checking off all the boxes: Go to college. CHECK. Get a good job. CHECK. Get promoted. CHECK. Marry the Love of my Life. CHECK. Build our dream house. CHECK...and live happily ever after.*

Or... at least that was our plan! But, there's a very different story of what came next.

Nelson was my best friend, the Love of my Life, and my beloved husband. He was 38-years old. He didn't have an accident. He wasn't even sickly. But our earthly journey together came to an abrupt end. His heart just stopped beating. I was devastated. I was so broken that I could hardly get out of bed for five and a half months. I heard God reaching out to comfort me in my pain, but I just couldn't answer. I was angry, disappointed, and hurt. But I couldn't even admit it. It was a struggle of faith.

But, it's also what led me to Woodside through GriefShare. It wasn't until the night we had a discussion about addressing anger that I realized what was keeping me from receiving God's grace. I needed to stop pretending! I needed to be honest with myself. And most of all, I needed to be honest with God. Not because He didn't know, but because we can't have real relationships unless we are honest. So, that night I allowed myself to rage.

And, in my brutal honesty, like a child, I screamed about the unfairness of His timing. And all of the sudden, I felt the Holy Spirit come upon me with what I can only describe as a perfect peace, a comfort, and a knowing that humbled me. I heard the voice of God gently acknowledge my pain... He said "I understand how you can feel it's unfair. Now let me ask you... whose rules are you using? Nelson was never really yours. He has always belonged to Me. Just as you are mine." In that moment, I saw the truth that had always been there. And, Jesus dried my tears and filled me with the breath of new life. I felt so loved, accepted, and safe. I was being held by Our Heavenly Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Now, I wish I could tell you that it's been easy since then, but... Because I have PTSD, I often still have times when I get so anxious that I feel almost completely paralyzed. I remember days struggling with God while in the middle of the most challenging part of my life. It was hard to practice patience with my healing, to take small steps to rebuild my strength, and to be brave enough to pick up the shattered pieces of what was.

God continued to call, but I felt so broken and confused. I just couldn't understand how I could possibly be of any help to anybody like this! Thankfully, He continues to have such patience with me as I work through my challenges, only to come back to the understanding that my job is obedience, my job is to love, my job is to develop & share the gifts that I've been given—and it always has been!

It wasn't until Roz got honest with God about her anger and grief over losing Nelson, that she started to see how He was working in her life and what He was calling her to do. As you review your life story, it's vital to examine different stages of your life: childhood, adolescence, adulthood. Erik Reese offers this helpful image:

Imagine yourself walking down a long hallway. On the walls are paintings that reflect those life-shaping moments in your life. On one side are portraits of experiences that brought you excitement, achievement, and fulfillment. On the other side hang pictures of experiences that caused pain, frustration, and remorse. Walking slowly down the hallway, looking carefully at each painting, is an important step toward understanding who God created you to be and discovering your Kingdom Purpose he has set aside just for you.¹

¹ Erik Reese (2008), S.H.A.P.E.: Finding and Fulfilling Your Unique Purpose for Life (pg. 97), Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books.

The positive side of the hallway are moments of blessedness. What achievements, successes, and breakthroughs, growth have you experienced? The painful side are your moments of brokenness. We are all recovering from something: abuse, bullying, cancer, divorce, addictions, depression, job loss, death of a loved one, miscarriage, bankruptcy, a dysfunctional family. We usually want to avoid these embarrassing, sorrowful, or depressing episodes. Yet if we take this journey with Jesus, He can help us see how he can use these experiences to help us and others.

On the first Easter, two of Jesus' disciples leave town still thinking their beloved Master was cruelly crucified and dead. So deeply grief-stricken, they do not recognize Jesus Himself walking with them. They see their circumstances as an utter defeat. To give them a different perspective, Jesus walks them through the highlight reel of the Old Testament

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. Luke 24:27

When they reach home and invite their Traveling Companion in for supper their eyes are finally opened at the moment when Jesus takes, blesses and breaks the bread. Our greatest discoveries come when we invite Jesus in. He takes us and uses our blessings and brokenness to help others. After the loss of her beloved Nelson, Roz's circumstances got worse not better.

*Roz: It's now 4 years later and I've seen how God uses both our brokenness and our blessedness to renew our faith in Him and His promises to us. Nowadays, I reflect on just how much my life has transformed. During this season, the Lord has called me to do so many things that I never could have imagined. Jesus put people in my life, then called me to invite them to meet Him—widows, widowers, friends, family... even strangers through the internet. I have to admit, walking in faith doesn't always **look** like it makes sense.*

A year after Nelson died, the company that I had sacrificed so many hours of our personal lives to over the years—went through a restructuring. That means that my role, my job, was eliminated. Like many others, I was laid off. And, both my husband and the second income he brought to our household were no longer there to support me. What was I going to do?! Family and friends didn't quite understand why I couldn't just work at some other big company, picking up where I had left off in my fast-paced, high-paying marketing career path. I felt paralyzed because I was being called to do something that seemed so different. And, I could feel it in my bones, that the corporate career path that I had grown accustomed to over the past 20 years was now a just terrible fit for me in this season of my life. But because I was afraid and unclear about how things would work out, I thought I didn't know what to do.

When I gave my life over to Jesus again. I surrendered fully. I put my trust in Him. And, He faithfully continues to guide, protect and sustain me with His never-ending provision. As it turns out, it's there in the moments of weakness that I feel the miracles of His Hand reaching into the darkness to save me, again and again, shining the Light of Hope into the moments of my terror. Jesus asked me to trust Him again.

You see, Our Heavenly Father is always there for us. Every time we admit that we need Him, and live in obedience, we're able to receive His grace, His blessings and His guidance on what to do next.

So, what was I supposed to do about being laid off?? I was supposed to be still, ask Him for His guidance, listen and obey. I turned to God. And, He helped me. God held me. And He continues to hold me, lead me, and feed me. You know what He did? He commanded me to bring forward the fishes & loaves that He'd already given me. He instructed me to ask my neighbors to borrow their jars for the oil that He's already blessed me with. And through it all, He has provided for me longer, and in more ways than I ever thought possible. ...all while I continue to obediently, and joyfully, focus on the work He's put in my path.

The Lord walked beside Roz through her darkness and brokenness. As she turned to Him and listened to Him she felt Him fill her emptiness with His abundance. The road ahead became clearer. Her gifts and passions started to align with skills she learned from her career and the struggles she endured in her grief. She began to see how her blessings and her brokenness could be used by Jesus to lift up those who travel similar roads. The Lord also opened the door for Roz to help Woodside spread His Good News far and wide. Roz shares her story to encourage you to look at the highlight reel of your life. God showed how her Gifts, Passion and Story come together in two opportunities, two callings which match her unique GPS. As you listen, think about where your God-given Gifts, Passions and Story may be leading you.

Roz: *This is NOT JUST MY story. It's your story, too. The details of your story might look different than mine, but He doesn't let anything, including our pain, go to waste. I can see how God has prepared me throughout my life for wherever I was headed next—equipping me with gifts, skills and opportunities to become more like who He created me to be. But it's something I could only see in the rear view mirror. I needed to first walk by faith, not by sight before I could see what He was doing.*

The Lord has revealed in me the spiritual gifts of faith, encouragement, and intercession; the skills of creative communication, and craftsmanship; as well as, lit a passion in me to help people who seem to be invisible in our hurting world—all so that they can find hope, meaning and purpose in Him.

As of right now, ADJUST Lifestyle Design is three and a half years in the making. It's the mission that God has placed in my life, in this season, to develop a service that connects widowed men & women with organizations & professionals to help them reclaim every aspect of their lives by learning how to take the future step by step...not only finding emotional support, but also learning practical skills like settling an estate, learning to cook, do the bills, make new friends, develop healthy habits, explore careers, and, of course, their spiritual life.

The good news is that God can transform our pain into purpose! Because of my pain I found GriefShare. Because of GriefShare I came to Woodside. And, because I saw Jesus through each of you, I stayed. And I got involved. I joined a growth group, made friends, and volunteered. I started to feel alive again.

Last year, when the pandemic hit, the Holy Spirit put it on my heart to propose a new way for us to continue worshipping as we were forced out of the church building. I could feel the need weighing on me more than ever to help people stay connected and keep hope. Fast forward to just a couple of months ago, God called Martha to a new ministry. And because the world had changed around us, not only did the church need a new staff member, but new needs were also identified to expand beyond the walls of Woodside. I saw the way open, and still I hesitated. My doubts crept in. Was I equipped? Would I fit in? Was I good enough for this holy honor? I prayed about it for a while. And, God revealed the next part of His plan for my life. He's prepared me, as He always has, for this next season.

I'm honored to say that I'm the new Director of Communications & Digital Discipleship at Woodside. Here, God is incorporating the 20-years of technical skills, work experience and passions that He's placed in me to expand His Kingdom! Don't you see?! Our Father's Hand truly is in everything! As hard as it is to accept at times, there is also a comfort to be found in knowing that His timing is His own for our lives; and that each of us has a unique God-given purpose.

Now, I'm not saying to quit your job and start a new company or to find a church that's hiring. What I am saying is: be still. Turn off the TV, put down your to-do list, and turn to Him. Ask for His guidance and listen. Then trust and obey Our Heavenly Father, so that He can lead you to the miraculous plans He's written just for you.

Our Heavenly Father is a Loving God, Who has blessings for each of us to share and receive through one another every day. In full disclosure, on some days I still feel broken, and it's only through my faith that I can see the miracle of His grace; and the gifts hidden within my grief.

It's my hope that everyone that hears my story today understands that our blessings can never truly be taken away. And that each day, our purpose is to Love God, Grow in Grace, and Share the Love, mercy, and God-given gifts with one another. Even when it's hard.

Let's follow Roz's example. Take some time this week and review the Highlight reel of your life – moments of Blessedness and Brokenness in your childhood, youth, young adult, middle adult and mature adults seasons. When I look back over the highlight reel of my life, I remember when I graduated from High School. On that day my youth leaders gave me card which said, "Your life is God's gift to you. What you do with your life is your gift to God." There are many ways we give back to God for all His blessings – through our time, our experience, our knowledge, our spiritual gifts and our financial gifts.

Today is Celebration Sunday, the day we commit to give to God's work through Woodside in the coming year. Why do we give to God's Kingdom work? To see more lives transformed like Roz. It was through GriefShare, Growth Groups, mission projects, worship services, and opportunities to use her gifts that Roz felt Jesus leading her through the valley of shadows into the Light of His love. Roz is just one of countless stories that have a different ending because of you. When you give yourself and your gifts, you transform the highlight reel of many lives near and far. You are making it possible for them to have a life story that never ends. Let's give ourselves in every way so there will be more life stories like Roz.