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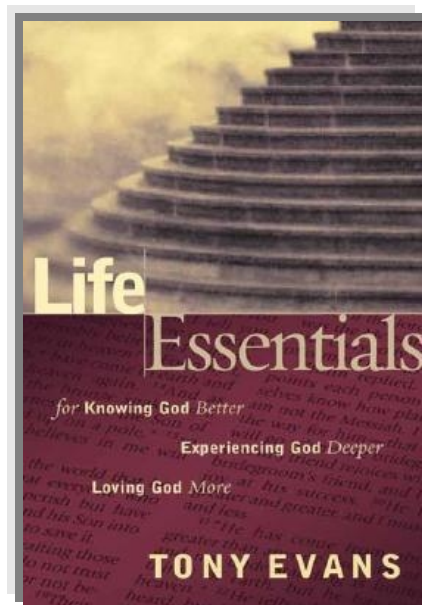
**LIVING A "SEINFELD" LIFE—PLOTLESS!**  
*[CALLING, OBEDIENCE & MATURITY]*

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# WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

**MAY 27, 2007**

FROM THE *MASTER WORKS* SERIES STUDY OF:



## LIVING A "SEINFELD" LIFE—PLOTLESS!

[CALLING, OBEDIENCE & MATURITY]

**D**o you remember the popular *Seinfeld* sitcom TV show from a few years back? You do unless you were living under rock, since it was one of the most popular programs on television for years during the 1990s. Can you name the main four characters? [JERRY, ELAINE, KRAMER & GEORGE] Do you remember the basic plot of the show? [IT WAS A SHOW ABOUT "NOTHING"] That's right, one of the unusual features of *Seinfeld* that contributed to its popularity was the fact that the show had no plot. The characters simply meandered from situation to situation with no apparent purpose or order to their lives. An analysis was done of the *Seinfeld* audience, and it was discovered that the reason so many people loved the program was that their lives were as aimless and plotless as those of the people on the show.

Far too many people today are living "*Seinfeld*" lives with no apparent purposes, like hamsters on a wheel inside a cage. These people may be running fast, but they are going nowhere. Their lives flicker like a candle instead of shining with the brilliance of the noonday sun. And the tragedy is that this description fits far too many of us Christians who say we believe that God made us and saved us for a purpose.

When I was a boy growing up in the small town of Lake City, we used to take Sunday afternoon drives as a family? You may remember those too. We never went anywhere, but we just meandered aimlessly with no destination. Now that may be an acceptable way to kill a few hours on Sunday afternoon, but it's not the way God designed us to live. Think about it. Many people have a career, a home, a family, and all the other things our society deems important, but they still feel like that life is incomplete. And the bottom line here for us Christians is that if that's true, then we may not have dealt with the issue of our calling. See, until each of us finds our own unique calling and that divinely ordained reason for being, we may continue to feel as if we're in the middle of a *Seinfeld* episode—no plot or plan to

life. True fulfillment is discovering the reason that God put you here on earth in the first place.

Today we finish our six-week study of Tony Evans' book *Life Essentials*, about learning how to grow spiritually in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Open your Bible to **Ephesians 1:17-18 (MSG)** and listen to these words of from Peterson's paraphrase in *The Message*: <sup>17-18</sup>*I ask—ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally, your eyes focused and clear, so that you can see exactly what it is he is calling you to do.*

Did you hear that? The last part of the verse says, *so that you can see exactly what it is he is **calling** you to do.* Think back to our foundational scripture verse from the first week of our study, **2 Peter 3:18**. Do you remember how we are to live? [FOR GOD'S GLORY AS HIS PEOPLE] I mentioned back in week one that you should memorize this verse. If you didn't, listen to its words again: <sup>18</sup>*but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.* One reason God wants you to grow in your faith is so that you will be able to maximize your calling, not only for your joy but for His calling.

As we begin this morning, I want to share three stories that have similar endings. The first story involves Chuck Colson. Chuck Colson was sent to prison for his part in Watergate during the Nixon administration. After Chuck Colson was released from prison he felt led to start a prison ministry. As he explained his calling to former President Nixon, Nixon objected. He told Chuck Colson he should seek a profession where he could make money.

The second story involved my brother. In the 70's my brother felt led to go to leave his successful insurance business in Surfside Beach and become a pastor. When he told our family that he was going to Louisville, Kentucky to seminary, several of us asked this question "Why are you moving to Louisville?"

The third story involved a couple in a previous church. The man was a successful pharmacist and owner of a grocery store and the wife was an educator with a masters in education. They were in their early 40s and had just adopted three children with two boys of their own. They felt called by God to go to sell the pharmacy, pack up their five children and move to Wake Forest and go to attend seminary and go into full time ministry somewhere—although they didn't know where. They had a good and comfortable life. However, they gave up all of that in order to serve enter full-time school. Many in our church and Sunday School class asked them this question, "Why are you selling your pharmacy at your age and moving to Wake Forest?"

All three of those stories have similar endings. All three stories contain the story of someone who does not understand the concept of God's call. In fact, the concept of God's calling is something none of us understand completely.

*A pastor received a call from a church that offered him a salary four times what he was receiving. Being a devout man, he spent much time in prayer trying to discern what God wanted him to do. One day a friend met the pastor's young son on the street. "Do you know what your dad is going to do?" he asked. "Well," replied the lad, "Dad's praying, but Mom's packing!" To know the will of God is not as easy as we would hope.*

Let me ask you to define what **calling** means? Plain language? [TONY EVANS SAYS: THE CUSTOMIZED LIFE PURPOSE THAT GOD HAS SHAPED, FASHIONED AND EQUIPPED FOR YOU IN ORDER TO EXPAND HIS KINGDOM AND BRING HIMSELF GREATER GLORY.] A calling is one of the grace gifts God has provided to every believer. Another way to explain this would be as God's **PLAN** for us. Do you recall the words of another memory verse from **Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)**? *<sup>11</sup>For I know the **plans** I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

**Ephesians 2:10 (NASB)** is another great verse dealing with our calling. Follow along as I read these words from Paul: *<sup>10</sup>For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.* This is a general statement of our calling, which is to produce what? Yes, “**good works**” that bless and help others glorify God. Your calling is not just what you do for a living, but your divinely preplanned service for God that is your response to the great grace He has shown you in salvation.

I want you to pause for a moment and think about your own epitaph. Have you ever done that? I remember when I was in an entry level journalism class at Carolina in the 1960s and told to write my own obituary. Not much there. Dean Welch born...lived...and died. Ugh! Remember what Dr. Luke said about King David. It's stated in **ACTS 13:36 (NASB)**, *<sup>36</sup>“For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers...”* And I know you remember what Paul said at the end of his ministry in his letter to Timothy (**1 Tim 4:7**) about fighting the good fight and finishing the race and keeping the faith. And, what about Jesus Christ as he was about to die? Listen to the words of **JOHN 17:4 (NIV)**, *<sup>4</sup>I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.*

The head of an executive search firm in Chicago uses a simple question to disarm job candidates. This experienced “head-hunter” has interviewed some of the most poised and powerful leaders in the nation’s third largest city. His task is to cut through their sophisticated exterior and find out how they react under pressure. He asks them a few simple questions that they can answer easily. Then he pauses and asks them one particular question that inevitably causes them to squirm, clear their throats, stutter and stammer. He simply asks them, “**What is your primary purpose in life?**”

It's amazing to me that so many people are not sure of their purpose in life. Companies have mission statements that explain why they exist. We used to have a great mission statement at our law firm. Many churches have mission statements that summarize their purpose for existing, just like we do here at First Baptist. So, if organizations need a clearly defined purpose, how much more important is it for individuals to have an understanding of their purpose?

This week in our Bible study we thought about some very important questions that everyone needs to determine for their own lives: a. Why are you here? b. What are you trying to accomplish in life? c. Where are you really going? I believe that a lack of purpose is the reason we have so many ineffective congregations and ineffective Christians. Someone once said, "Wandering around with a "hit or miss" mentality produces erratic results. You will "miss" much more than you will "hit". And last year I went to hear the inspirational motivator, Zig Ziglar, at the Convention Center and remember him saying, "We cannot make it as a wandering generality. We must be a meaningful specific."

Each one of us has received a special, divine gift for service in our calling. Listen to the words from **1 Corinthians 12:7, 11 (NASB)**, *<sup>7</sup>But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good ... <sup>11</sup>But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.* One of the reasons many of us are missing our calling is that we're missing our gift. We have settled for a secular definition of why we are here and have missed God's eternal purpose, which is why He has given each of us unique abilities and experiences and desires.

Turn to **1 Peter 4:10 (NASB)** and listen to what Peter said about these gifts: *<sup>10</sup>As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

**Do you know what God has called you to do? Do you know how God has gifted you? If so, how are you using your giftedness for God's glory?** If you can't answer these questions, or if you are not at least pursuing their answers, your spiritual growth is going to be limited because you are NOT fulfilling your reason for being. Dr. Evans reminds us that when we discover God's calling, we won't have to force ourselves to fit anywhere since God has placed each part of Christ's body exactly where He wants it to be. So the church here should be the primary beneficiary of your gifting, even though you may also serve in other places.

Our lives tend to be so scattered. Intrigued by one trend only until the next comes along. Suckers for the latest craze or quick fix. This project, then another. Lives with no strategy, no goal, no defining priority. Like playing the holes on the golf course out of order. Erratic. Hesitant. Living life with the hiccups. We are easily distracted by the small things and forget the big things. I saw an example of this the other day at Sam's Club.

*There is one section at both Costco and Sam's Club where I am a seasoned veteran: the food sample section. I'm never one to pass up a snack. Last week I went to the grocery and food section where the samplers tend to linger. Bingo! There were two sample givers awaiting hungry sample takers. One had a skillet of sausage and the other a plate full of cream-cheese-covered celery. You'll be proud to know I opted for the celery. I wanted the sausage, but I knew the celery was better for me.*

*Unfortunately, the celery lady never saw me. She was too busy straightening her sticks. I walked past her, and she never looked up. The sausage lady, however, saw me coming and extended the plate. I declined and made another circle past the celery lady. Same response. She never saw me. She was too busy getting her plate in order. So I made another loop past the sausage lady. Once again the offer came, and once again—with admirable resolve, I might add—I resisted. I was committed to doing the right thing.*

*So was the celery lady. She was determined to get every celery stick just so on her plate. But she cared more about the appearance of her product than the distribution. I stopped. I coughed. I cleared my throat. I did everything but sing a song. Still no response. The sausage lady, however, was waiting on me with sizzling sausage. I gave in; I ate the sausage.*

*The celery lady made the same mistake we all make sometimes. She got off target. She was so occupied with the small matters (i.e., celery organization) that she forget her assignment (i.e., to help needy, hungry, pitiful shoppers like me).*

How do we keep from making the same mistake in life? God wants us to be just like Jesus and have **focused hearts**. How do I select the right plan and stay on target? Consulting the map would be a good start. The one who designed our course left us directions. By answering four simple questions, we can be more like Jesus; we can stay on course with our lives.

**AM I FITTING INTO GOD'S PLAN?** Romans 8:28 says, *"We know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans" (TLB)*. The first step for focusing your heart is to ask this question: Am I fitting into God's plan? God's plan is to save his children. *"He does not want anyone to be destroyed but wants all to turn away from their sins" (2 Pet. 3:9 TEV)*.

If God's goal is the salvation of the world, then my goal should be the same. Regardless of what you don't know about your future, one thing is certain: you are intended to contribute to the good plan of God, to tell others about the God who loves them and longs to bring them home. But exactly how are you to contribute? What is your specific assignment? Let's seek the answer with a second question.

### **WHAT ARE MY LONGINGS?**

This question may surprise you. Perhaps you thought your longings had nothing to do with keeping your life on track. I

couldn't disagree more. Your heart is crucial. **Psalm 37:4** says, *"Enjoy serving the LORD, and he will give you what you want."* When we submit to God's plans, we can trust our desires. Our assignment is found at the intersection of God's plan and our pleasures. What do you love to do? What brings you joy? What gives you a sense of satisfaction?

Some long to feed the poor. Others enjoy leading the church. Others relish singing or teaching or holding the hands of the sick or counseling the confused. Each of us has been made to serve God in a unique way. Remember what Ephesians 2:10 said that we read earlier about why we were created: *"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10 NIV).*

The longings of your heart, then, are not incidental; they are critical messages. The desires of your heart are not to be ignored; they are to be consulted. As the wind turns the weather vane, so God uses your passions to turn your life. God is too gracious to ask you to do something you hate. Be careful, however. Don't consider your desires without considering your skills. Move quickly to the third question.

**WHAT ARE MY ABILITIES?** There are some things we want to do but simply aren't equipped to accomplish. I, for example, have the desire to play scratch golf. That would give me wonderful satisfaction. The problem is, I can't do it. I'm not the athlete in the family that my brothers are. I am what you might call the more creative and artsy brother. The only way I can shoot in the 70s in golf is to quit after the 12<sup>th</sup> hole and just not play the last 6 holes. Paul gives good advice in **Romans 12:3**: *"Have a sane estimate of your capabilities" (PHILLIPS).*

In other words, be aware of your strengths. When you teach, do people listen? When you lead, do people follow? When you administer, do things improve? Where are you most productive? Identify your strengths, and then—this is important—major in them. Take a few irons out of the fire so this one can get hot.

Failing to focus on our strengths may prevent us from accomplishing the unique tasks God has called us to do.

*A lighthouse keeper who worked on a rocky stretch of coastline received oil once a month to keep his light burning. Not being far from a village, he had frequent guests. One night a woman needed oil to keep her family warm. Another night a father needed oil for his lamp. Then another needed oil to lubricate a wheel. All the requests seemed legitimate, so the lighthouse keeper tried to meet them all. Toward the end of the month, however, he ran out of oil, and his lighthouse went dark, causing several ships to crash on the coastline. The man was reprovved by his superiors, "You were given the oil for one reason," they said, "to keep the light burning."*

We cannot meet every need in the world. We cannot please every person in the world. We cannot satisfy every request in the world. But some of us try. And in the end, we run out of fuel. Have a sane estimate of your abilities and stick to them. One final question is needed.

**AM I SERVING GOD NOW?** Upon hearing this, you may start feeling restless. Maybe I need to change jobs. Perhaps I should relocate. I guess Dean is telling me I need to go to seminary ... No, not necessarily.

Again, Jesus is the ideal example. When do we get our first clue that he knows he is the Son of God? In the temple of Jerusalem. He is twelve years old. His parents are three days into the return trip to Nazareth before they notice he is missing. They find him in the temple studying with the leaders. When they ask him for an explanation, he says, "*Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business*" (Luke 2:49 NKJV).

As a young boy, Jesus already senses the call of God. But what does he do next? Recruit apostles and preach sermons and perform miracles? No, he goes home to his folks and learns the family business.

That is exactly what you should do. Want to bring focus to your life? Do what Jesus did. Go home, love your family, and take care of business. Your first mission field is under your roof. What makes you think they'll believe you overseas if they don't believe you across the hall?

But Dean, I'm ready to do great things for God. Good, do them at work. Be a good employee. Show up on time with a good attitude. Don't complain or grumble, but "work as if you were doing it for the Lord, not for people" (Col. 3:23).

**THE P.L.A.N.** Pretty simple plan, don't you think? It's even easy to remember. The whole thing is part of an acrostic:

Am I fitting into God's **Plan**?

What are my **Longings**?

What are my **Abilities**?

Am I serving God **Now**?

Why don't you take a few moments and evaluate your direction? Ask yourself the four questions. God allows you to start fresh at any point in life. "**From now on, then, you must live the rest of your earthly lives controlled by God's will and not by human desires**" (1 Pet. 4:2 TEV). Circle the words from now on. God will give you a fresh start. Regardless of what has controlled you in the past, it's never too late to get your life on course and be a part of God's P.L.A.N.

As we close, remember our entire study was about maturing and growing spiritually. Dr. Evans said in Week One that bottom-line, spiritual growth is defined as simply, ***More of Christ being expressed in my life through less of me!***

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MAY 20, 2007