KINGDOM PURPOSE

Complete Course Content

All 13 sessions, in full — teaching, word studies, Discovery Steps and reflection.

thedisciplespath.com · free online & downloadable

TABLE OF CONTENTS

13 Sessions

ORIENTATION

01 Made on Purpose — Why your purpose is found where your design, your heart and your story meet — and why it's revealed dot by dot, not downloaded from a quiz.

02 Learning to Listen — How to hear the Holy Spirit through every step, why you're the least reliable witness to yourself, and the listening rhythm the rest of the course depends on.

DESIGN

03 Your Gifts — Your spiritual gifts, natural strengths and personality — what God put in your hands, tested and weighed by fruit.

04 Your Design — The talent you walk past, the values you won't trade, and a single statement of what you were built to do.

AFFINITY

05 Your Heart — What breaks your heart, what fills it back up, and why neither one is an accident.

06 Your Arena — Where God has already had you serve, and which sphere of society He's drawing you into next.

07 Your Vision — The God-sized dream you'd attempt if you knew He was in it — and a single statement of where your heart runs deepest.

SHAPING

08 Your Story — The milestones that turned your direction and the people who shaped you — including the ones who hurt you.

09 Your Measure — The field where God has given you authority — over the atmosphere, never over people — and the victories that prepared you.

10 Your Refining — What your hardest seasons built in you, and the promises God has spoken over you on the other side of them.

11 Your Name — Who God says you are, what He's been refining you into, and a single statement of what your life has prepared you for.

PURPOSE

12 Your Purpose	Your design, your heart and your story brought together in one mission statement of fifty words or less.
13 Living on Purpose	Consecrating your mission, living it little by little, telling your God Story, and finishing well.

1

MADE ON PURPOSE

Kingdom Purpose: Orientation

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 He Also Made Me Fast

03 The Question Everyone Asks

04 Hands, Heart, and History

05 One Dot at a Time

06 The Turn

07 The Experience · Where You're Starting

The Question

Near the middle of the 1981 film *Chariots of Fire*, the Scottish sprinter Eric Liddell stands on a hillside above Edinburgh with his sister Jennie. She is afraid his running is pulling him away from the mission field in China. He answers her with the line that made the film famous:

> *"I believe that God made me for a purpose, for China. But He also made me fast, and when I run I feel His pleasure."*

Eric Liddell, as written by screenwriter Colin Welland · *Chariots of Fire*, 1981 · watch the scene

The real Liddell never said it; Welland wrote it. And the real Jennie never opposed her brother's running; she supported it. But the line has outlived the film because it names something most believers feel and few say out loud. Notice the word in the middle: *but*. On one side is the purpose, which is sacred, serious and probably far away. On the other side is the thing you are good at, the thing that makes you come alive, which feels like a pleasure you're allowed rather than a calling you're given.

Most Christians live somewhere inside that *but*. They suspect God has something specific in mind for them. They also suspect it will turn out to be the opposite of what they love and do well. So they either stall, waiting for a call that never comes, or settle for a general answer that could belong to anyone.

So the question is:

If God made you for something specific, how do you find out what it is — without guessing, without borrowing someone else's calling, and without settling for an answer so general it could belong to anyone?

This session doesn't answer that question for you. It shows you how the rest of this course will help you answer it.

> **OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)**
>
> *Father, You made me on purpose and for a purpose, and You know exactly what it is. I don't. Take the "but" out of how I think about my life. Show me what You built into my hands, what You set in my heart, and what You have been doing in every season I've lived through. I'm willing to go slowly, as long as I'm going with You. In Jesus' name, amen.*

He Also Made Me Fast

The desires and abilities God built into you are not rivals of your calling. They are evidence for it. The film's *but* sets pleasure against purpose, as if God were the kind of Creator who makes a thing for one job and then gives it a love for another. Scripture describes a different God.

> *"May the splendor of the Lord endure!* ***May the Lord find pleasure in the living things he has made!****"*
>
> **PSALM 104:31**

Psalm 104 is a long, delighted tour of creation, from wild donkeys and nesting birds to people going out to their work until evening (Psalm 104:10–23), and it closes by praying that God will *enjoy* it all. He takes pleasure in things functioning as He made them to function. A sprinter running flat out, doing the thing he was built to do, is not a distraction from the Creator's glory. He is one small example of it.

Another psalm, one of David's, makes a promise to the person who takes pleasure in God:

> *"Then you will take delight in the Lord, and **he will answer your prayers**."*
>
> **PSALM 37:4**

Most English readers know this verse in an older wording, "he will give you the desires of your heart." The NET's "prayers" is a fair rendering: the Hebrew word means a request or petition. Read carefully, the verse does not promise that God will rubber-stamp whatever you happen to want. It promises something better. The person whose delight is in the Lord finds that what they ask for starts to come from the same place as what God wants to give. Delight comes first, and it reshapes the desire.

That is why the desires of a heart that loves God are worth examining rather than suppressing. They are not infallible, and they are not irrelevant either. They are data, and this course will ask you to read that data carefully, with God, over time.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> The historical Eric Liddell never lived inside the film's *but*. He was born on 16 January 1902 in Tianjin, China, the son of Scottish missionaries with the London Missionary Society, so China was not a distant sacrifice to him. It was home. At the 1924 Paris Olympics he declined to run the heats of the 100 metres, his strongest event, because they fell on a Sunday. The film dramatizes this as a last-minute crisis on the boat to France; in fact the schedule had been public for months, and Liddell trained instead for the 400 metres. He won it in 47.6 seconds, a world record at the time.
>
> The next year he went back to Tianjin and spent most of the rest of his life teaching mathematics and science at the Anglo-Chinese College and doing mission work. When Japan occupied the region he was interned at the Weihsien camp, where he taught science and Bible classes to the children held there and organized their games. They called him Uncle Eric. He died in the camp on 21 February 1945, of an undiagnosed brain tumor. The speed and the calling were never two lives. They were one life, lived in order.

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That whatever you enjoy is automatically your calling, or that desire is self-certifying.
- That a calling will always feel pleasant, or that difficulty means you've missed it.

WHAT I AM SAYING

- That the things God built into you, including what you love and what you do well, are real evidence about what He made you for.
- That evidence has to be read, tested and confirmed, which is exactly what the rest of this course is built to do.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What is your *but*? Name the thing you love or do well that you have quietly assumed has nothing to do with God's purpose for you.

The Question Everyone Asks

The hunger to know what your life is for is universal, because it is built in. But a general answer will not satisfy a specific hunger.

The evidence for the hunger is everywhere. In 2002 a Southern California pastor published a book whose subtitle was the question itself, *What on Earth Am I Here For?*, and it became one of the best-selling nonfiction books in history. Its opening argument is blunt:

> *"Without God, life has no purpose, and without purpose, life has no meaning. Without meaning, life has no significance or hope."*
>
> Rick Warren · Pastor, Saddleback Church · *The Purpose Driven Life*, 2002

Half a century earlier, a Viennese psychiatrist came out of Auschwitz and the Dachau concentration camps with the same conclusion, reached by a much harder

road. Viktor Frankl watched prisoners who had a reason to live outlast those who did not. He borrowed a line from Nietzsche to summarize what he saw:

> *"He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how."*
>
> Viktor E. Frankl · Psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor · *Man's Search for Meaning*, 1946 (English 1959)

Warren's book answers the question in general terms. Every believer was made to worship God, to belong to His family, to become like Christ, to serve, and to join His mission. All of that is true, and all of it is shared. It is the purpose of every Christian who has ever lived. What it cannot tell you is the thing you actually lie awake wondering: *what is mine?* Which part of God's purpose is yours to carry, in your generation, with your hands?

Scripture treats that as a real question with a real answer. Luke records Paul preaching in a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, summarizing the life of Israel's greatest king in a single sentence:

> *"For David, after he had served God's purpose (βουλῇ) in his own generation, died, was buried with his ancestors, and experienced decay,"*
>
> **ACTS 13:36**

WORD STUDY

βουλή *boulē* G1012

"purpose" · Acts 13:36

Range. Counsel, purpose, a considered plan. It can describe human deliberation, such as the soldiers' plan in Acts 27:42, but the New Testament uses it especially for God's settled plan, as in "the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27) and "the counsel of his will" (Ephesians 1:11). In the Greek Old Testament it often translates the Hebrew *ʿēṣâ*, "counsel, plan."

The sense here. God's settled plan, not David's ambition. Luke does not say David pursued his own purpose, or that God blessed David's plans. He says David *served God's* purpose, and he fixes where and when: "in his own generation."

Why it carries the argument. The verse holds together the two things this course depends on. The purpose is God's. David did not invent it, and you won't invent yours. Yet it was specific: one man, one assignment, one slice of history. When it was done, David died. Your specific purpose is not something separate from God's great plan. It is your share of it, measured to your generation.

Source. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

That is the difference between the general answer and the specific one. Both are true. Only one of them can tell you what to do on Tuesday.

PAUSE & REFLECT

If someone summarized your life the way Paul summarized David's, in one sentence, what would you want that sentence to say you served?

Hands, Heart, and History

Your specific purpose lies where three things God has already done in you converge. He designed you, He set affections in your heart, and He has shaped you through everything you've lived. This course calls them your **Design**, your **Affinity** and your **Shaping**, and it will spend most of its sessions helping you see each one clearly.

Scripture speaks to all three, often in the same breath:

> *"**Your hands made me and formed me.** Give me understanding so that I might learn your commands."*
>
> **PSALM 119:73**

> *"**He is the one who forms every human heart**, and takes note of all their actions."*
>
> **PSALM 33:15**

> *"And we know that **all things work together for good** for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose,"*
>
> **ROMANS 8:28**

The first is your *Design*, the hands. It covers the capacities God built into you before you ever believed: spiritual gifts, natural abilities, your temperament (personality), the talent you have that others don't, and the values that govern how you use all of it. The second is your *Affinity*, the heart. It is what you are drawn to: what breaks your heart, what recharges you, where you have served gladly, the sphere of society you care about, and the vision you can't shake. The third is your *Shaping*, your history: what God has been doing through every season you've lived, and what it has taught you. Romans 8:28 promises that "all things" — the milestones, the mentors, the victories and the failures — are being worked together toward His purpose.

None of this was improvised after you arrived. God said to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in your mother's womb I chose you. Before you were born I set you apart" (Jeremiah 1:5). Jeremiah's appointment as "a prophet to the nations" was his own, and not every reader will be called to the same thing. But the pattern of the verse is not unique to him. The choosing came before the forming, and the forming served the choosing.

ILLUSTRATION

Nehemiah is the clearest case in Scripture of all three lenses converging on one assignment. His *heart*: when he heard that Jerusalem's wall lay breached and its gates burned, he "sat down abruptly, crying and mourning for several days" (Nehemiah 1:4). Hanani and the men with him had seen Jerusalem for themselves (Nehemiah 1:2). It was Nehemiah, hearing it secondhand in Susa, who could not stop weeping. His *shaping*: "Now I was cupbearer for the king" (Nehemiah 1:11). Years of service in the palace had put him within arm's reach of the one man who could authorize the rebuilding, and had taught him how to ask. When the moment came, he asked for letters of safe

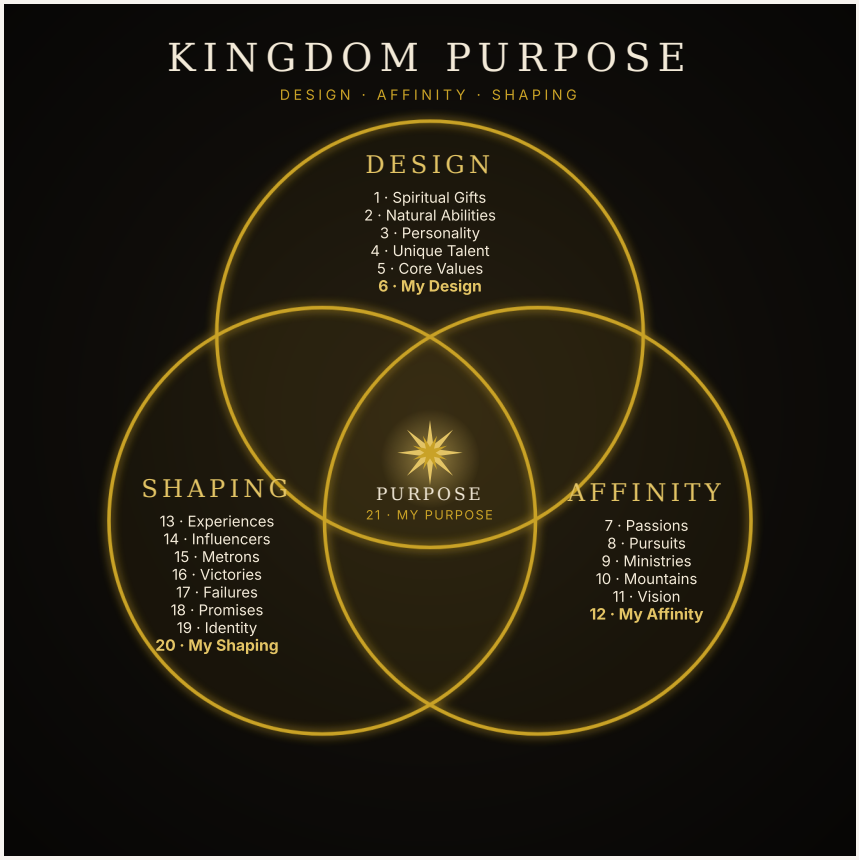
passage and timber from the king's own forest (Nehemiah 2:7–8). His *design*: he organized a demoralized population, assigned the work family by family, and handled armed opposition, and "the wall was completed… in just fifty-two days" (Nehemiah 6:15).

Take away any one of the three and the wall doesn't get built. Without the heart, he's a well-placed official who never bothers to ask. Without the shaping, he's a mourner in Susa with no access to the king. Without the design, he has the king's permission and a pile of timber, but no one working on the wall.

This is why the course looks at all three and doesn't stop at any one of them. A spiritual gifts test alone gives you a result shared by millions of people. A passion alone gives you energy without direction or capacity. A life story alone gives you a biography. Purpose is found where the three overlap. The leadership researcher J. Robert Clinton spent decades studying how God develops leaders, and he gave that overlap a name:

> *"During Phase V convergence occurs. That is, the leader is moved by God into a role that matches gift-mix, experience, temperament, and so on."*
>
> J. Robert Clinton · Professor of leadership, Fuller Theological Seminary · *The Making of a Leader*, 1988

One verse holds all three together. Read Romans 8:28 again, all the way to the end: "And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, **who are called according to his purpose**." The first half speaks to your history. The last clause speaks to everything. The Greek word translated *purpose* is *prothesis*, literally a "setting forth": a purpose placed in view beforehand. Paul uses the same word for God's purpose in Ephesians 1:11 and 2 Timothy 1:9. Your design, your heart and your history aren't three separate stories. They're three views of one purpose that God set forth before you were born, and all three are being worked toward it. That's why this course keeps looking for the place where they overlap.



The whole road ahead. *Design* asks what God has built into you. *Affinity* asks what He has drawn your heart toward. *Shaping* asks what He has been doing through your history. Each numbered step is something you will *do*, not just read about. The bold steps (6, 12 and 20) are summaries: at the end of each section you condense what you've gathered into a single statement, and at Step 21 those three statements become one.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Of the three — hands, heart, history — which do you already understand best about yourself? Which do you understand least?

WHAT ABOUT ...

Isn’t this just a personality test with Bible verses attached?

Here is the objection at full strength, and it deserves to be heard that way. *Secular career counselors have asked these same questions for decades. The strengths assessments and interest inventories used in every corporate HR office ask what you’re good at, what you enjoy, and what your history suggests. This process even uses some of the same secular tests. The church has a long habit of taking a corporate tool, adding verses, and calling it discipleship. And Scripture never tells anyone to take an inventory. Moses met a burning bush. Isaiah saw the Lord. Paul was knocked to the ground on the Damascus road. God calls people. He doesn’t have them fill out forms.*

Part of that is simply true, and it’s better to concede it plainly. The overlap with secular tools is real, and it is not an embarrassment. God designed every human being, believer or not, so a well-built strengths assessment can accurately observe something God built. Theologians call this general revelation

> GENERAL REVELATION
>
> The knowledge of God available to every human being through creation, conscience and the ordinary order of the world, as distinct from special revelation (Scripture, and supremely Christ). It is real but partial: it shows that there is a Maker and something of His power and wisdom, but not the gospel.
>
> *Paul says God's "invisible attributes… have been clearly seen, because they are understood through what has been made" (Romans 1:20). In this course: a secular strengths test can accurately observe a gift God built into someone, whether or not the person or the test credits Him.*
>
> Treated fully in Kingdom Purpose, Session 1

: God’s workmanship is visible in what He made, whether or not the observer credits Him. A craftsman who has never opened a Bible can still be extraordinarily gifted, and a secular test can notice it.

The difference is not in the questions. It is in four things the tests cannot supply. First, *the results are evidence, not a verdict*. Every test in this course is read with the One who designed you, and the next session is entirely about hearing Him. Second, *the Shaping section asks what no inventory measures*: what God has done with your failures, your losses and the words spoken over you. Third, *the destination is different*. A secular inventory aims at your fulfilment. This process aims at your share of God’s *boulē*, and it will insist that your final statement require God to accomplish it. Fourth, *Scripture does show purpose being recognized, not only announced*. Bezalel is not given a vision. He is “filled… with

the Spirit of God in skill, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship" (Exodus 31:3), and his skill is how his assignment is recognized. The apostles didn't wait for a sign when they chose the Seven. They looked for men "well-attested, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3). Dramatic calls happen. So does calling recognized through gifting and testimony, and it is far more common.

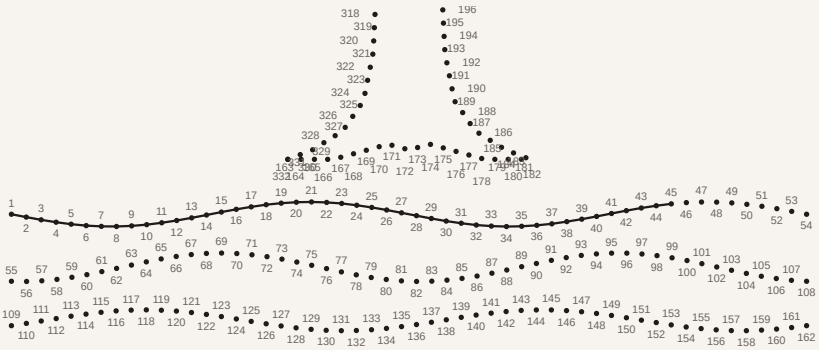
Where this stays unresolved. Scripture does not give a step-by-step method for discovering an individual believer's purpose. No verse lists twenty-one steps. The process in this course is a synthesis. I developed it over roughly ten years of teaching, praying and listening, and I've watched it bear fruit in the lives of people who worked through it honestly. My own conviction is that it is a disciplined way of listening to God, built from patterns Scripture really does show: gifting recognized, hearts formed, lives shaped. But it is a tool, not a text. Hold it the way you'd hold any tool: gratefully, and loosely enough to let God overrule it.

One Dot at a Time

Purpose is drawn out over time, not downloaded in a moment, and the slowness is part of God's method, not a flaw in it. That's the claim this section defends, and it is the claim most likely to test your patience.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Think back to the connect-the-dots pages you worked as a child. The picture was already on the paper, hidden in a scatter of numbered dots. Your job wasn't to invent it. Your job was to find dot 1, then dot 2, and watch something appear that you couldn't see when you started.
>
> Now imagine a page with not thirty dots but millions. That's the best picture I know of a human life. The Creator has already drawn the masterpiece. You hold the pencil, and from where you sit you can see only the few dots nearest your hand. A line here, a curve there — you have no idea yet what's being revealed.
>
> And you probably remember what children do with those pages. They get impatient. They guess at the picture, skip ahead to where they think it's going, and connect dot 14 to dot 30. The line cuts straight across the drawing. Anxious adults do the same with their lives: we decide what the picture must be, skip the dots that feel slow, and draw lines God never numbered.

When I've used this picture in the classroom, that's the moment the room goes quiet, because everyone has a stray line or two. So here is the good news, and it's better than any paper puzzle. God doesn't take the page away. He graciously lets you find the right dot and start again from there. And then He does something no crayon puzzle can do: He works even the stray lines into the picture.



Dot 45 of 415. This is the corner of a real dot-to-dot picture drawn for this course. Forty-five dots are connected. What is it? From here, you can't tell. You'll see more of this picture as the course goes on.

That last claim isn't wishful thinking. Some of the stray lines on your page you drew yourself; some were drawn by other people. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, the straightest stray line in Genesis, and years later he told them, "As for you, you meant to harm me, but God intended it for a good purpose, so he could preserve the lives of many people, as you can see this day" (Genesis 50:20). The line wasn't erased; it became part of the picture. That is Romans 8:28's promise, and it's why the Shaping section will ask you to look hard at your failures.

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That your life is a fixed tracing, with every line predetermined and your choices irrelevant.
- That there is one hidden "right dot" you might have missed forever, leaving the rest of the picture ruined.

WHAT I AM SAYING

- That the Artist already knows the picture, and He is patient with the one holding the pencil.

- That from wherever you are, including after a stray line, the next right dot can be found, and God will help you find it.

One more word about the picture itself. Every human being bears God's image (Genesis 1:27), including your neighbor who has never opened a Bible. But Scripture says more of those in Christ: "we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand" (Ephesians 2:10). The image is God's gift to every person. The composition, as Kingdom Essentials Session 8 showed, is His new work in you.

Proverbs has a verse that describes how the picture is uncovered:

> *"Counsel (עֵצָה) in a person's heart is like deep water, but an understanding person draws it out."*
>
> **PROVERBS 20:5**

WORD STUDY

עֵצָה *ʿēṣâ* H6098

> **"counsel"** · Proverbs 20:5

Range. Counsel, advice; by extension, a plan or purpose. It can be the advice one person gives another, the plan a person forms for themselves, or God's own settled purpose. The same word appears one chapter earlier: "There are many plans in a person's mind, but it is the counsel of the Lord which will stand" (Proverbs 19:21).

The sense here. A person's own plans and intentions, the purposes that actually govern them. The proverb's point is where those purposes live. They are not on the surface, available to a quick glance. They lie "like deep water," and they have to be *drawn*, the way water comes up from a deep well: by someone with understanding, patiently, a bucket at a time.

Why it carries the argument. The verse describes the work of this course exactly. You are not inventing a

purpose, and you are not waiting for one to be dropped on you. You are drawing up what is already there, and that takes skill and time. Proverbs 19:21 adds the guardrail. Not every *ʿēṣâ* in a human heart is the *ʿēṣâ* of the Lord, and only His will stand. So what you draw up has to be tested against His counsel, which is why every step in this course is done in prayer. And it is a word the Greek translation of the Old Testament often rendered *boulē*, the word Luke used for the purpose David served.

Source. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

Scripture's clearest examples of purpose are not stories of instant clarity. They are stories of pictures revealed one dot at a time:

- **Abraham** left Haran at 75 (Genesis 12:4); Isaac was born when he was 100 (Genesis 21:5). Twenty-five years of waiting.
- **Joseph** dreamed at seventeen (Genesis 37:2) and stood before Pharaoh at thirty (Genesis 41:46). Thirteen years, spent in a pit, in slavery and in prison.
- **Moses** tried to rescue his people by force at about forty (Acts 7:23–25), a stray line if ever there was one, then spent forty years in Midian (Acts 7:30) before standing before Pharaoh at eighty (Exodus 7:7).
- **Paul** waited three years after his Damascus road conversion before visiting Jerusalem, and fourteen more before his mission to the Gentiles was formally recognized (Galatians 1:17–18; 2:1).

None of those delays were wasted. Each was a stretch of dots that made the rest of the picture possible.

Clinton found that the leaders who finish well understand this. The first of the seven lessons he drew from studying effective leaders reads simply:

> *"Effective leaders see present ministry in light of a life time perspective."*
>
> J. Robert Clinton · "God's Shaping Processes with Leaders," Barnabas Publishers

In practical terms, there are twenty-one Discovery Steps in this course, and each asks you to *do* something. Think of each step as a few more dots. Give every step at least a day; some will take two or three, a few a week. In an actual group to work through these steps, the people who finished met weekly and kept one

another moving, and they took three to five weeks. Working alone, plan on six to ten. The pace is yours, and no one will grade your answers, which means you have to know for yourself when a step is done. The end of this session shows you how.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where have you tried to skip ahead to the picture, deciding what your life must be about before God had shown you? What stray lines are on your page, and are you willing to let Him work them in?

WHAT ABOUT …

Starting this at seventy — or at twenty?

The objection comes from both ends of life, and both deserve a real answer. At seventy it sounds like this: *My working years are behind me. Purpose discovery is for people with decades ahead of them. At my age this is nostalgia, not direction.* At twenty it sounds like this: *I haven't lived enough yet. My Shaping section will be three lines long. Anything I write now will be thin, or wrong.*

To the older reader, Scripture's answer is almost comically direct. Moses received his assignment at eighty. At eighty-five, Caleb stood before Joshua and said, "Today I am still as strong as when Moses sent me out… Now, assign me this hill country which the Lord promised me at that time!" (Joshua 14:11–12). He wasn't asking for a quiet retirement. He was asking for the hill country with the fortified cities in it. Acts 13:36 says David died *after* he had served God's purpose, not before, and not at a retirement age. If you are still here, your assignment is not finished. What's more, your Shaping section will be the richest in any group working through this course. Clinton observed that the convergence of gift, experience and role often comes later in life. It comes later because it builds on everything that came before.

To the younger reader, the answer is the one God gave Jeremiah when he protested, "I am too young": "Do not say, 'I am too young.' But go to whomever I send you" (Jeremiah 1:6–7). Your Design and Affinity sections will be every bit as clear as anyone's, because gifts, abilities and passions are present early. Your Shaping section will be shorter, and your final mission statement will be more

provisional. That's not a flaw in the statement. It's an honest first draft, and you should plan to revisit it.

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture does not promise that every believer will see the full fruit of their purpose within their own lifetime. Hebrews 11 lists men and women who "all died in faith without receiving the things promised, but they saw them in the distance and welcomed them" (Hebrews 11:13). You can discover your purpose and serve it faithfully without ever seeing where it leads. The course can help you find the assignment. It can't promise you the view.

The Turn

Everything above has been explanation. God takes pleasure in what He made, and that includes what He made you able to do and love. He has a settled purpose, a *boulē*, and He gives each generation's servants their share of it. That share lies where your Design, Affinity and Shaping converge, and it lies deep, where it has to be drawn out slowly and tested against His counsel.

Now it becomes yours to act on. You can't discover your purpose by reading about purpose. The rest of this course is built around twenty-one things you will actually do. Before you do the first, you need to know where you're starting from, and you need to set up the rhythm that will carry you through the next several weeks. That's what the rest of this session asks of you.

The Experience · Where You're Starting

Find the paragraph you wrote at the end of Kingdom Essentials Session 8, if you wrote one. It answered a single question: *Looking honestly at your actual life, what has God clearly been training you for?* If you didn't write it, or can't find it, write it now. Give it one honest paragraph. Don't write what would sound good read aloud; write what is actually true.

Then, underneath it, write three sentences, one for each lens. Each one is a guess, and that's fine:

- *My hands:* "I think God built me to be good at …"
- *My heart:* "I think God set my heart on …"
- *My history:* "I think my life has been teaching me …"

Date the page. Don’t polish it, and don’t show it to anyone yet. At Step 21, weeks from now, you’ll come back to this page and compare it with the mission statement you’ve written by then. For most people the comparison is the most encouraging moment in the course, because they can see how much was drawn up out of deep water in between.

DISCOVERY STEPS · GETTING READY

From here on, each session ends with **Discovery Steps**. Each step gives you five things: the *prompt*, stated as a question; exactly *what to produce*, such as a list of five, a sentence of twenty-five words, or a ranked three; a *“You’re done when …”* checklist; a *surface answer* next to a *deep answer*, so you can see the difference instead of guessing at it; and *worked examples* from real people who have done the step, used anonymously and with permission. There is no coach reviewing your work. The checklist is the coach. Don’t move on until you can honestly tick every box.

GET READY · 1

Choose your Purpose Journal. Keep it electronically if you can: a single document or notes file, one place for all twenty-one steps. Every later summary step will ask you to reread earlier answers, and an electronic journal lets you copy and paste them into an AI tool (Claude, ChatGPT and the like) when you reach those summary steps and want help seeing the patterns across everything you’ve written. If you think better with a pen, write by hand and then type each finished answer into the document.

GET READY · 2

Choose your time and place. Most steps need twenty to forty minutes of uninterrupted time, often on more than one day. Pick a regular time and a place where you won’t be interrupted, and put it on your calendar now.

GET READY · 3

Name one witness. Choose one person who knows you well and will tell you the truth: a spouse, a close friend, a mentor. Several steps will ask you to check your answer with someone. Ask them now whether they're willing. Even better, ask them, or one or two others, to take the journey with you, so you can encourage one another and listen together. People who work through these steps alongside someone else tend to keep going, and Session 2 will show you why it helps you hear.

GET READY · 4

Complete The Experience above. Your seed paragraph and three sentences, dated, on the first page of your journal.

YOU'RE READY FOR SESSION 2 WHEN …

- [ ] Your journal exists, and its first page holds your dated paragraph and three sentences.
- [ ] You have a regular time and place, and it's on your calendar.
- [ ] One named person has agreed to be your witness.
- [ ] You've read Proverbs 20:5 enough times that you could say it from memory.

BIG IDEAS

1. The things God built into you, including what you love and what you do well, are evidence about your purpose, not rivals of it.
2. Every believer shares God's general purpose. Each believer also has a specific share of it, a *boulē* served "in his own generation" (Acts 13:36).
3. Your specific purpose lies where three things converge: your Design (hands), your Affinity (heart) and your Shaping (history).
4. Your life is a masterpiece already drawn by the Creator and revealed one dot at a time. Skipping ahead draws stray lines, but God lets you restart on the right dot and works even the stray lines into the picture (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28).

5. At seventy or at twenty, you are not too late and not too early. If you are still here, your assignment is not finished.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You don’t invent your purpose. You draw out the one God already put there.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You find pleasure in what You made, and You made me. Forgive me for every time I’ve treated what You built into me as a distraction from Your will. Your purpose is deep water, and I can’t draw it up by myself. Give me an understanding heart, patience for the slow work, and the honesty to test every plan in my heart against Your counsel, because only Yours will stand. I want to serve Your purpose in my generation. In Jesus’ name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Duncan Hamilton, *For the Glory: Eric Liddell’s Journey from Olympic Champion to Modern Martyr* (2016).
The real Liddell, beyond the film: China, Paris, Tianjin and Weihsien, and a life in which the speed and the calling were never in competition.

Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (1998).
The best treatment of the difference between our shared calling to God and the particular callings He gives each of us, which this session could only sketch.

SUBSTANTIAL

J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader* (1988; rev. ed. 2012).
The research behind this session's "lifetime perspective" and "convergence," and the most useful single companion to the Shaping section of this course.

ACADEMIC

Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (2006).
The full biblical theology of the boulē your personal purpose serves: God's single mission, traced from Genesis to Revelation.

LEADING THIS SESSION

This session is orientation, not encounter, so keep the group time practical. The two places groups predictably stall are the *What About* on personality tests, where someone who distrusts assessments will want to argue, and the timeline, where someone will ask whether they can do it faster. For the first, concede what the session concedes and point to the Unresolved note. For the second, say plainly that the steps can't be compressed, but the group can agree on a shared pace, for example two steps a week, with each member free to go slower. Before people leave, have each one name their witness aloud to the person next to them. Group questions: *What is your "but"?* and *Which of the three lenses — hands, heart, history — do you know least about yourself?*

> If you have questions or comments about this content, or about your personal situation, email us at feedback@thedisciplespath.com.

Next: Every step in this course ends with the same instruction: *listen*. Session 2, *Learning to Listen*, is about how. How do you hear God clearly enough to trust what you write down?

SESSION 1 · KINGDOM PURPOSE

Made on Purpose

If God made you for something specific, how do you find out what it is?



God takes pleasure in what He made. What you love and do well is evidence for your calling, not a rival to it.

Psalm 104:31
Psalm 37:4

Everyone shares God's general purpose. David served his specific share of God's *boulē* "in his own generation."

Acts 13:36

Purpose lies where Design, Affinity and Shaping converge, as they did for Nehemiah.

Psalm 119:73
Psalm 33:15
Romans 8:28

Your life is a masterpiece revealed one dot at a time. When you draw a stray line, God lets you restart, and works even that line into the picture.

Proverbs 20:5
Genesis 50:20

SO · NOW

SO

You don't invent your purpose. You draw out the one God already put there.

NOW

Set up your Purpose Journal, write your starting paragraph and three

guesses, choose your time, and name your witness.

Discovery Steps · Getting Ready

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You don’t invent your purpose. You draw out the one God already put there.

© thedisciplespath.com

2

LEARNING TO LISTEN

Kingdom Purpose: Orientation

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 The Least Reliable Witness

03 The Spirit Who Knows What You Were Given

04 Two or Three Witnesses

05 What Pushes Back

06 The Turn

07 The Experience · Search Me

The Question

In 1955 two psychologists at UCLA, Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham, drew a simple square divided into four panes, and named it after themselves: the Johari window. One pane holds what you know about yourself and others know too. One holds what you know and keep hidden. One holds what nobody knows yet. And one, the one that has made the diagram famous in every leadership seminar since, holds what other people can plainly see about you and you cannot. They called it the *blind* pane.

Every one of the twenty-one steps ahead asks you to describe yourself: your gifts, your heart, your history. And every one of them runs into the blind pane. You will overrate some things and wave others away. You will write what you wish were true, or what you were told was true when you were twelve. You are the only person who has lived your life from the inside, and for exactly that reason you are not a neutral witness to it.

So the question is:

How do you hear what God says about you, when the one doing the listening is also the one being described?

Kingdom Essentials Session 9 answered whether God still speaks and how ordinary believers learn to hear Him. This session takes that for granted and asks the harder, narrower question every step in this course depends on.

> **OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)**

Father, You know me better than I know myself. You see the things I overrate and the things I've never noticed. I don't want to describe the person I wish I were, or the person someone once told me I was. I want to hear who You say I am. Search me. Open my ears, and give me the humility to believe what You show me, even when it surprises me. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Least Reliable Witness

When it comes to knowing yourself, you are the least reliable witness in the room. That isn't an insult. It's what Scripture says about every human heart, including the most mature.

> *"The human mind is more deceitful than anything else. It is incurably bad.* ***Who can understand it?*** *I, the Lord, probe into people's minds. I examine people's hearts."*
>
> **JEREMIAH 17:9–10**

Jeremiah's question is not rhetorical despair. It has an answer, given in the very next breath: the Lord can. The heart is opaque to its owner and transparent to its Maker. That sets the terms for this whole course. You can't discover your purpose by looking harder at yourself. You discover it by asking the One who can see what you can't.

Paul knew this about himself, and he was not a man given to false modesty:

> *"So for me, it is a minor matter that I am judged by you or by any human court. In fact,* ***I do not even judge myself****. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not acquitted because of this. The one who judges me is the Lord."*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 4:3–4**

Paul is talking about his faithfulness as a servant, not about spiritual gifts, but the principle carries straight across. A clear conscience is not a complete picture. “I am not aware of anything” is exactly what everyone says about their blind pane.

The distortion runs in both directions, and you should expect both. Some readers will inflate: they’ll list gifts they admire rather than gifts they have, and write a vision that is really a wish to be seen. Many more will deflate. They were raised to believe that naming a strength out loud is pride, so they’ll bury a real talent under “I’m not really good at anything.” Paul’s instruction cuts against both at once:

> *“For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but **to think with sober discernment**, as God has distributed to each of you a measure of faith.”*
>
> **ROMANS 12:3**

Sober is the opposite of intoxicated, and self-assessment can be intoxicated in either direction. Paul doesn’t ask you to think *less* of yourself. He asks you to think *accurately*, measured against what God actually distributed to you. Three verses later he starts listing the gifts.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Luft and Ingham’s point was that the blind pane is not a character flaw. Everyone has one, and it can only be shrunk one way: by feedback from someone who sees what you don’t. Notice what the blind pane is *not*. It isn’t a list of hidden faults waiting to be exposed. It holds whatever others can see and you can’t, and that very often includes strengths. Think of the friend who was astonished to learn that everyone considered her the calmest person in the room, or the man who never knew his coworkers brought him their hardest problems because he explained things so clearly. They weren’t hiding those gifts. They simply couldn’t see them from the inside.
>
> That’s the pattern you should expect in this course. Your witness will rarely tell you something devastating. Far more often, they’ll name something good you’ve been walking past for years.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Which way do you lean when you describe yourself: inflating or deflating? What did you learn growing up about saying out loud what you’re good at?

The Spirit Who Knows What You Were Given

The Holy Spirit's work includes showing you what God has already given you. You don't have to guess at your own design. You can ask the One who knows it, and Scripture says that is exactly what He was sent to do.

> *"For who among men knows the things of a man except the man's spirit within him? So too, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things that are freely given* (χαρισθέντα) *to us by God."*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 2:11–12**

WORD STUDY

χαρίζομαι *charizomai* G5483

> **"freely given"** · 1 Corinthians 2:12

Range. To show favor or kindness; to forgive (a debt or an offense); to give graciously, give freely, bestow. It shares its root with *charis*, "grace," and it appears twenty-three times in the New Testament.

The sense here. Bestowal, not forgiveness. Paul is not talking about sins forgiven but about gifts given, "the things God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). Thayer lists this verse under the sense "to give graciously, give freely, bestow." The participle describes what already lies in the believer's possession, handed over by grace.

Why it carries the argument. The verse gives the Spirit a specific job description: "so that we may *know*" what God has *freely given* us. Much of what you're about to discover isn't hidden in the future. It's already in your possession, given before you knew to look. The problem is that you can't see it clearly, and the Spirit is given precisely so that you can. That makes this course an act of receiving, not achieving. You are asking the Giver to show you His gifts.

Source. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

Paul's comparison is precise. Only a person's own spirit knows his thoughts; only God's Spirit knows God's thoughts. And that same Spirit has been given to you. The One who searches "even the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10) is not intimidated by the deep water of your heart from Session 1.

That makes the prayer David wrote in Psalm 139 the right prayer to begin every step of this course:

> *"**Examine me, and probe my thoughts!** Test me, and know my concerns! See if there is any idolatrous tendency in me, and lead me in the reliable ancient path!"*
>
> **PSALM 139:23–24**

The psalm opened with the same verb as a statement of fact: "O Lord, you examine me and know" (Psalm 139:1). It closes by turning the fact into a request. David doesn't ask God to learn something new about him. He asks God to show him what God already knows. That's the posture of every Discovery Step ahead: *You already know this about me. Show me.*

One more thing to expect when the Spirit shows you something: it will usually be specific. When the Lord sent Ananias to the man who had come to Damascus to arrest believers, He didn't send a mood or a general nudge:

> *"Then the Lord told him, 'Get up and **go to the street called "Straight," and at Judas' house look for a man from Tarsus named Saul**. For he is praying…'"*
>
> **ACTS 9:11**

A street, a house, a hometown and a name. God isn't always that detailed, and you shouldn't demand it. But it gives you a working test for everything you write in this course. If a hundred other believers could have written your answer word for word, you probably haven't heard it yet; you've recited it. In an actual group that worked through these steps, the coach's most useful question was some form of: *Is this unique to you, or could it fit a thousand other people?*

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That every answer in this course should sound spiritual or mention God.
- That something God shows you will never sound ordinary.

WHAT I AM SAYING

- That the Spirit speaks through the way God built you, and much of what He shows you will come in plain, everyday words. In the Design steps especially, the best answers are often ones a coworker who doesn't share your faith would recognize at once. In that group, the correction the coach made most often in those steps was some version of "take your Christianity out of your thinking."
- That *specific* is the mark to aim for. "I encourage people" could be anyone. "I can tell within a minute who in the room feels left out, and I go and sit with them" is someone.

ILLUSTRATION

When Samuel arrived in Bethlehem to anoint Israel's next king, everyone in the story misread the candidates, including the prophet. Jesse's firstborn walked in, and Samuel said to himself, "Surely, here before the Lord stands his chosen king!" (1 Samuel 16:6). God corrected him on the spot: "People look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (16:7). Seven sons passed by. None were chosen.

The one God had chosen wasn't even in the room. When Samuel asked whether there were any more, Jesse answered, "There is still the youngest one, but he's taking care of the flock" (16:11). His own father hadn't thought David worth sending for. Samuel refused to sit down until the boy arrived, and when he did, God said, "Go and anoint him. This is the one!" (16:12).

> The prophet misjudged, the father overlooked, and David, keeping sheep in a field, almost certainly had no idea what was coming. Only God read the room correctly. Your family, your church and you yourself may have long-settled opinions about which son is the king. Hold them loosely until you've asked Him.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Is there something God has "freely given" you that you've never really thought of as a gift, because it came easily or because nobody around you valued it?

Two or Three Witnesses

Anything you believe God has shown you about yourself should be tested by more than one witness before you build on it. That protects you from your blind pane, and it protects you from mistaking your own voice for His.

The principle is older than the church:

> *"A single witness may not testify against another person for any trespass or sin that he commits.* ***A matter may be legally established only on the testimony of two or three witnesses.****"*
>
> **DEUTERONOMY 19:15**

The law was written for courtrooms, not for self-discovery, and I'm applying it by analogy. But it's an analogy the New Testament itself makes (Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1), and the underlying wisdom is the same: one voice is not enough to settle something important. When the church at Antioch received the clearest calling in the book of Acts, it came through the Spirit and was received by the community together:

> *"While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, '**Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.**' Then, after they had fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them, they sent them off."*
>
> **ACTS 13:2–3**

Notice who heard. Luke says the Spirit spoke while "they" were worshiping: the prophets and teachers of the church, not Paul alone. Barnabas and Paul's own sense of calling (Paul had carried his since Damascus) was confirmed by others who heard the same thing. When the Jerusalem council later settled a question that divided the whole church, their letter used a phrase worth borrowing for this course: "it seemed best to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). The Spirit and the community, together.

J. Robert Clinton found the same pattern in the lives of leaders he studied over decades:

> *"Normally major decisions will see the convergence of God's voice in the heart (the emotional desires), God's voice in circumstances (providential factors), God's voice in the church (confirmation from mature fellow Christians…), and God's voice in the Word. …but there is safety in balanced confirmation. The problem can be stated this way: Leaders tend to make decisions without a balanced cluster of guidance elements."*
>
> J. Robert Clinton · Professor of leadership, Fuller Theological Seminary · *The Making of a Leader*, 1988

Those four witnesses are built into this course. **The Word:** every step is anchored in Scripture, and nothing you write can contradict it. **The heart:** every step is done in prayer, and you'll record what you sense as well as what you think. **The church:** your witness from Session 1 will be asked to read and respond at key points. **Circumstances:** the assessments you'll take and the history you'll review are the providential evidence, the record of what God has actually done in and through you.

> **ILLUSTRATION**

The boy Samuel heard the voice of God three times in one night and didn't recognize it once. That wasn't a failure of faith. The narrator explains it plainly: "Samuel did not yet know the Lord; the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him" (1 Samuel 3:7). Each time, he ran to the old priest. The third time, "Eli then realized that it was the Lord who was calling the boy" (3:8), and he gave Samuel the words to answer with: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (3:9).

Notice who recognized the voice first. Not the one being called, but the older believer in the next room. Eli was hardly a model priest; the same chapter announces judgment on his house (3:11–14). Yet he knew what God's voice sounded like at a time when Samuel didn't yet.

An actual group that worked through these steps found something similar. They met weekly and practiced listening together, and one woman's clearest answer at the Identity step came, as she put it, "the last time we did this in class." Not everyone heard in the room, and some heard plenty alone. But if you can, don't work through this course by yourself. Find one or two people who will do the steps alongside you, meet when you can, and listen together. Someone in the room may recognize the voice before you do.

ILLUSTRATION

Years ago I took a spiritual gifts test, and the results told me I was destined to be a worship leader in children's ministry. I can't carry a tune, play an instrument or write a single line of lyrics. And though I love my grandkids dearly, the thought of devoting my time to kids' ministry leaves me in a cold sweat. I took a similar test a few months later and got very different results.

The test wasn't useless; it was one witness, and a noisy one. Tests like that are influenced by what you've been reading lately, where you're currently serving, even the last sermon you heard. That's why every assessment in this course is treated as evidence to be weighed alongside the others, never as a verdict.

CONSIDER THIS · USING AI HONESTLY

At the summary steps (6, 12, 20 and 21) this course will suggest pasting your earlier answers into an AI tool and asking it to find the patterns. That can be genuinely useful. But an AI is a mirror, not a witness. It can only reflect what you gave it. It has not watched you live, and it cannot tell you what God said. Only the Spirit knows "the things that are freely given to us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:12).

An actual group that worked through these steps showed both sides. At the summary steps some of them ran their answers through an AI tool themselves, and their coach did the same for others, offering the result as a draft. One woman read both versions and kept her own. Another read both over and over, chose the AI's, and could say exactly why. One pasted a summary of about four hundred words into her journal unchanged ("this is probably cheating," she admitted). Another

participant's summary still addressed him as *you*. Same tool, very different results. The difference was whether the person stayed the author.

Four rules will keep you the author:

- **Write first.** Answer every step yourself before you show anything to an AI. It should summarize your listening, never replace it.
- **Ask it to reflect, not to decide.** Ask what patterns it sees, what repeats, what seems to be missing. Don't ask it what your purpose is.
- **Rewrite everything it gives you in your own words.** If a sentence still says "you" or "your," or uses a word you'd never say, it isn't yours yet.
- **Keep only what rings true when you pray over it.** Read the draft aloud to God. Cut anything that doesn't resonate in your spirit, however polished it sounds.

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That your purpose is decided by majority vote, or that you need everyone's permission to believe what God has shown you.
- That tests, friends or AI tools can substitute for listening to God yourself.

WHAT I AM SAYING

- That a conviction confirmed by Scripture, prayer, a mature friend and the evidence of your life is far more trustworthy than one that rests on a single voice, including your own.
- That when the witnesses disagree, the disagreement is information. Stay with the step until you understand why.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Who in your life has named something in you that you dismissed at the time? Were they right?

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn’t looking for a hidden plan for my life a pagan notion?

This objection comes from serious scholarship, and it deserves to be stated the way its strongest advocate states it. Bruce Waltke, one of the most respected Old Testament scholars of his generation, argues in *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?* that the whole enterprise of “finding” God’s secret plan for your life is closer to divination than to biblical faith. Pagan religions sought hidden knowledge from the gods through signs and omens. Christians who anxiously hunt for God’s hidden blueprint, reading every closed door and coincidence as a coded message, are doing something uncomfortably similar. Waltke points out that the New Testament offers no instance of a believer asking God for guidance on a perplexing personal choice and receiving a supernatural answer. His conclusion: stop trying to find God’s secret will, and follow His revealed will. Read the Bible, develop a heart for God, seek wise counsel, watch God’s providence, and use sound judgment.

Much of that should simply be accepted. If this course encouraged you to treat every coincidence as an omen, or to hunt for a mystical blueprint that God is hiding from you, Waltke’s critique would land squarely. It doesn’t. Look at his list again. Scripture, a heart for God, wise counsel, providence, sound judgment: that is very nearly the list of witnesses in the previous section, and it is the method of every step ahead. This course isn’t searching for a secret. It’s asking you to recognize, with sober judgment, what God has *already given* you (1 Corinthians 2:12). Romans 12 doesn’t treat that as divination. It commands it: think soberly about the measure God distributed, then use the gift you have (Romans 12:3, 6).

Where this course goes beyond Waltke is in expecting the Spirit to speak personally in the process, as He did at Antioch, and as Kingdom Essentials Session 9 argues He still does. That’s a real difference, and it runs along a well-known line between traditions.

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture does not promise that God will speak to every believer, in words, about their particular purpose. Some people who work through this course carefully will finish with a mission statement that is wise, well-confirmed

and deeply true, and still never have heard anything they'd describe as God's voice. That is not failure, and it is not evidence of weak faith. It may simply be the way God chose to lead them: through His Word, His gifts, His people and His providence, which is exactly the way Waltke describes. I believe He often speaks more directly than that, and I've experienced it. But I can't promise you the experience, and neither can Scripture.

What Pushes Back

Expect resistance. Almost everyone who begins this process meets it somewhere along the way, and people who don't know to expect it tend to assume it means they've done something wrong. It usually comes in one of three forms: fear, inertia and opposition.

It also tends to gather in the same places. In early 2026 twenty people began these steps together, meeting weekly with a coach. All of them made it through the first ten steps; seven wrote a final mission statement. The ones who stopped stalled where the course asked them to dream (Step 11), to pull their answers about their heart into a summary (Step 12), and to look back at the hard parts of their history (Steps 13–17). The note their coach wrote most often, a dozen times, was "Don't give up the process." Mark those places now. When you reach one and find yourself putting it off, it isn't failure. It's where almost everyone slows down.

Fear usually comes first, and it wears reasonable clothes. When God called Moses at the burning bush, Moses raised five objections in a row. *Who am I?* (Exodus 3:11). *What's your name?* (3:13). *What if they don't believe me?* (4:1). *I'm not eloquent* (4:10). And finally, with the pretense dropped: "O my Lord, please send anyone else whom you wish to send!" (4:13). Every objection sounded like humility. Underneath all of them was fear of what the calling would cost. God's answer never changed: "Surely I will be with you" (3:12); "I will be with your mouth" (4:12). You may find that you don't want to know your purpose, because knowing it means you might have to act on it. Paul told Timothy, whose gift had apparently cooled, to "rekindle God's gift… For God did not give us a Spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:6–7). Sometimes fear doesn't refuse at all. It just goes vague, and produces a dream so general that no one could ever tell whether it came true. Step 11 will push back on that.

Inertia is quieter, and more dangerous, because it never announces itself. The writer of Hebrews uses one word for it, twice, in two very different places:

> *"On this topic we have much to say and it is difficult to explain, since you have become sluggish* (νωθροί) *in hearing."*

HEBREWS 5:11

WORD STUDY

νωθρός *nōthros* G3576

> **“sluggish”** · Hebrews 5:11

Range. Slow, sluggish, indolent, dull, languid. It occurs only twice in the New Testament, both times in Hebrews.

The sense here. In 5:11 the readers have become *nōthros* “in hearing”: dull of ear, no longer taking in what they’re told. A chapter later the same word describes their perseverance: “so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and perseverance inherit the promises” (Hebrews 6:12).

Why it carries the argument. The writer uses one word for a listening problem and a follow-through problem, because they’re the same problem. Inertia doesn’t begin with quitting. It begins with not quite hearing, the step you mean to get to, the prayer you rush, and it ends with a promise left uninherited. The cure Hebrews offers is not willpower but imitation: “those who through faith and perseverance inherit.” That’s what the rhythm at the end of this session is for.

Source. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Strong’s Concordance via Bible Hub.

Opposition is real, and Jesus named it. In the parable of the sower, the first seed never gets the chance to grow: “the evil one comes and snatches what was sown in his heart” (Matthew 13:19). If God begins to show you what He made you for, don’t be surprised if distractions, discouragement and a sudden busyness arrive in the same week. Two other soils in the same parable fail for less dramatic reasons, the thorns of “worldly cares” among them (13:22), and those are far more common. The instruction for all of it is short: “So submit to God. But resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). The enemy is resisted, not feared, and he flees.

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That every delay, distraction or hard week is a spiritual attack.
- That you should expect this process to be a battle, or that trouble means you're on the right track.

WHAT I AM SAYING

- That some resistance is normal, and noticing it is half of beating it.
- That the answer to fear, inertia and opposition is the same: stay close to God, keep your rhythm, and don't quit.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Of the three — fear, inertia, opposition — which is most likely to stop you in the next month? What would you tell a friend in your position?

WHAT ABOUT ...

What if I pray and hear nothing?

Here is the objection as people actually feel it. *I've asked, waited and sat in silence with my journal open. Others come back with names and pictures and verses. I come back with nothing. Either I'm doing it wrong, or God doesn't speak to people like me.*

One woman in an actual group that worked through these steps put it more honestly than that. At the vision step she spent a week asking the Holy Spirit to confirm or change what she had written, and heard nothing. The last time she was sure God had spoken to her was years earlier, and the years between had been the hardest of her life. Dreaming with God, she wrote, had become "a sore subject."

What I told her is what I'd tell you. Ask two questions, and if neither one fits, do one thing.

First, *what's the last thing He said?* Sometimes He is waiting for us to obey what He already said before He says more. Jesus tied ongoing revelation to obedience:

> *"The person who has my commandments and obeys them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him* ***and will reveal myself to him****."*
>
> **JOHN 14:21**

Second, *have I trusted what He already said?* Sometimes the last word is waiting to be believed, not repeated.

And if neither question turns anything up, be patient. Silence is not a verdict on you. Isaiah describes a person who fears the Lord and obeys His servant and still walks without light, and the instruction to that person is not to search their heart for the hidden flaw. It is to trust:

> *"Who among you fears the Lord? Who obeys his servant? Whoever walks in deep darkness, without light,* ***should trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God****."*
>
> **ISAIAH 50:10**

Samuel himself grew up in a season when "word from the Lord was rare" (1 Samuel 3:1).

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That silence means you've disobeyed, or failed to trust. Those are questions to ask, not conclusions to draw.
- That you must hear something before you're allowed to go on to the next step.

WHAT I AM SAYING

- That faithful people sometimes walk without light, and Scripture tells them to trust, not to audit themselves.
- That “not yet” is an honest answer. Write it in your journal and keep going. The steps, your witness and the evidence of your life are also ways He leads, as the Unresolved note above says.

She kept going. She finished every step, and at the end she wrote that the mission statement she had arrived at “resonates to my soul.” The silence at Step 11 wasn’t the end of her story. It was a stretch of dots she couldn’t yet see the shape of.

PAUSE & REFLECT

If God has seemed quiet with you, what’s the last thing you’re sure He said? What did you do with it?

The Turn

Everything above has been explanation. You are not a neutral witness to yourself. God is, and His Spirit was given so that you can know what He has freely given you. What you hear about yourself should be confirmed by more than one witness: the Word, your heart in prayer, a mature friend and the evidence of your life. Opposition will come, and it can be resisted.

Now it becomes practice. A listening posture isn’t something you understand once and then have. It’s a rhythm, built by repetition, and the next twenty-one steps will depend on it. So before Step 1, you’re going to build the rhythm and try it on the one question every later step is really asking.

The Experience · Search Me

Set aside twenty uninterrupted minutes, in the time and place you chose in Session 1.

Begin by reading Psalm 139:23–24 aloud, slowly, as your own prayer. Then ask God one question, and only one: *Father, what do You see in me that I don't see?* Sit quietly for ten minutes. Don't fill the silence and don't argue with what comes. Write down anything you sense: a word, a memory, a verse, a picture, a person's name. Write it exactly as it comes, even if it seems small or strange.

Then, sometime in the next few days, ask your witness the same question in plain words: *What do you see in me that I might not see in myself?* Tell them you want the good as much as the hard. Write down what they say without defending yourself or correcting them.

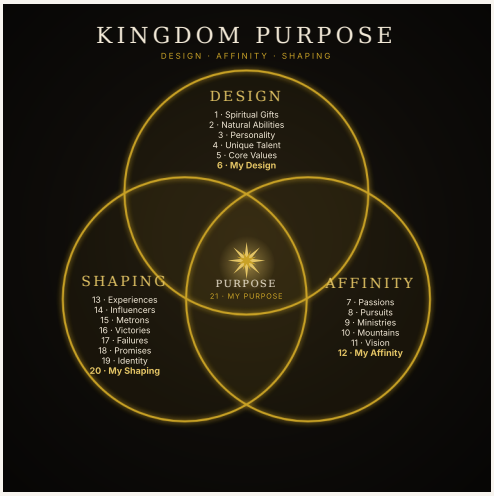
Put the two lists side by side in your Purpose Journal. Where do they overlap? What surprised you? Test what you've written against Scripture: does anything contradict it? Then leave the page alone. You'll come back to it more than once.

If you have a companion for the course, try the twenty minutes together at least once: pray, sit in silence side by side, then each read aloud what you wrote, the way Samuel brought what he heard to Eli.

If nothing came during your twenty minutes, write that down too. "Nothing came" is honest data, not failure. Try again another day, and keep going with the steps either way. God is not less present in the silence than in the words, and your witness's answer and the steps themselves are also ways He speaks.

DISCOVERY STEPS · THE LISTENING RHYTHM

This is the rhythm you'll use for every step in the course. Practice it now, on the Experience above, until it feels ordinary.



Every step on this map gets the same five moves: ask to be searched, do the work, sit with it, test it with the witnesses, sleep on it.

RHYTHM · 1

Ask to be searched. Begin each step by praying Psalm 139:23–24, or a sentence of your own that asks the same thing.

RHYTHM · 2

Do the work. Take the assessment, write the list, answer the prompt. Write honestly and fast; don’t polish yet.

RHYTHM · 3

Sit with it. Read what you wrote, then sit quietly for five minutes and ask: *Is this true? Is anything missing? Could anyone else have written it?* Add whatever comes, and if the answer could fit a thousand other people, keep going until it couldn’t.

RHYTHM · 4

Test it with the witnesses. Under your answer, keep four short lines in your journal: *Word* (does Scripture contradict it or support it?), *Heart* (what did I sense in prayer?), *Church* (what did my witness or companions say, when the step asks?), *Evidence* (does my actual life back this up?).

RHYTHM · 5

Sleep on it. Come back the next day and reread before you call the step done. Some steps may get their best line on the second day.

YOU'RE READY FOR SESSION 3 WHEN …

- [ ] You've prayed Psalm 139:23–24 and asked *What do You see in me that I don't?* on at least three different days.
- [ ] Your witness has answered the same question, and you've written their answer down without editing it.
- [ ] Your journal holds both lists side by side, with the four witness lines under them.
- [ ] You can name the form of resistance (fear, inertia or opposition) you're most likely to meet, and what you'll do when it comes.
- [ ] You've marked Steps 11, 12 and 13–17 in your journal as the places to expect it.
- [ ] You've asked at least one person to work through the steps alongside you, or you know who you'll check in with each week.

BIG IDEAS

1. You are the least reliable witness to yourself. The heart is opaque to its owner and transparent to its Maker (Jeremiah 17:9–10).
2. The Spirit was given "so that we may know the things that are freely given to us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:12). Discovering your purpose is receiving, not achieving.
3. Sober judgment cuts both ways. It forbids inflating yourself and forbids burying what God actually gave you (Romans 12:3).
4. What you hear about yourself should be confirmed by more than one witness: the Word, your heart in prayer, mature believers, and the evidence of your life. When God speaks, expect it to be specific, and if you can, listen alongside others.
5. Expect fear, inertia and opposition, and expect them in the same places: where you're asked to dream, to summarize and to look back. Each one is resisted the same way: stay close to God, keep

your rhythm, and don't quit. "Not yet" is an honest answer; keep going.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You can't read the label from inside the jar. Ask the One who wrote it.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You examine me and know me. I don't. Thank You for giving me Your Spirit so that I can know what You've freely given me. Show me what I've overrated and what I've walked past. Give me witnesses who will tell me the truth, and the humility to hear them. When fear tells me to ask You to send someone else, remind me that You'll be with me. When I grow sluggish, wake my ears. I want to hear You. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Bruce K. Waltke, *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?* (1995; rev. ed. 2002).
The strongest short statement of this session's What About, from a leading Old Testament scholar. Read it to sharpen your listening, not to stop it.

SUBSTANTIAL

Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (1999; updated ed. 2012).

The best single book on hearing God as an ordinary, lifelong, testable conversation, and the natural companion to the Listening Rhythm.

ACADEMIC

Garry Friesen with J. Robin Maxson, *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View* (1980; rev. ed. 2004).

The fullest argument for the "wisdom" view of guidance that Waltke summarizes. Read it alongside Willard to see both sides of the line this session names.

LEADING THIS SESSION

This session is a practice, not an encounter, so keep the group's attention on the rhythm rather than on dramatic experiences. The predictable stall is the *What About*: someone from a more cautious tradition will be relieved by Waltke, and someone from a charismatic background will be offended by him. Let both be heard, then point to the Unresolved note, which honors both. The most valuable thing you can do is make the blind-spot question safe. Pair people up and have each partner answer, briefly and only positively, *"What do you see in them that they might not see?"* Most people have never heard it said out loud. Group questions: *Do you tend to inflate or deflate?* and *Which form of resistance are you most likely to meet?* Keep an eye on the calendar as well as the room. In an actual group, the drop-offs came at Step 11 (Vision), Step 12 (the Affinity summary) and Steps 13–17 (the hard history). Check in personally with anyone who goes quiet at those points, and make the weekly meeting a place where "not yet" is an acceptable answer.

> If you have questions or comments about this content, or about your personal situation, email us at feedback@thedisciplespath.com.

Next: Session 3, *Your Gifts*, begins the Discovery Steps. Step 1 asks what spiritual gifts God has given you; Step 2 asks what He built into you naturally; Step 3 asks how He wired your personality. You'll take three short assessments and read the results with the rhythm you've just learned.

SESSION 2 · KINGDOM PURPOSE

Learning to Listen

How do you hear what God says about you, when you're the one being described?



The heart is opaque to its owner and transparent to its Maker. Sober judgment forbids both inflating and deflating.

Jeremiah 17:9–10
Romans 12:3

The Spirit was given so you can know what God has freely given you. Pray: Search me. Expect what He shows you to be specific.

1 Corinthians 2:12
Psalm 139:23–24
Acts 9:11

Word, heart, church and evidence. There is safety in balanced confirmation, and it helps to listen alongside others.

Deuteronomy 19:15
1 Samuel 3:8–9
Acts 13:2–3

Fear, inertia and opposition come to almost everyone, and they gather where you're asked to dream, summarize and look back. Resist them the same way: stay close, keep the rhythm, don't quit.

Exodus 4:13
Hebrews 5:11
James 4:7

SO · NOW

SO

You can’t read the label from inside the jar. Ask the One who wrote it.

NOW

Pray *Search me*, ask God and your witness what they see that you don’t, and practice the five-part Listening Rhythm.

Discovery Steps · The Listening Rhythm

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You can’t read the label from inside the jar. Ask the One who wrote it.

© thedisciplespath.com



YOUR GIFTS

Kingdom Purpose: Design

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Given, Not Chosen

03 Reading Your Results

04 Built Before You Believed

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · Before the Tests

The Question

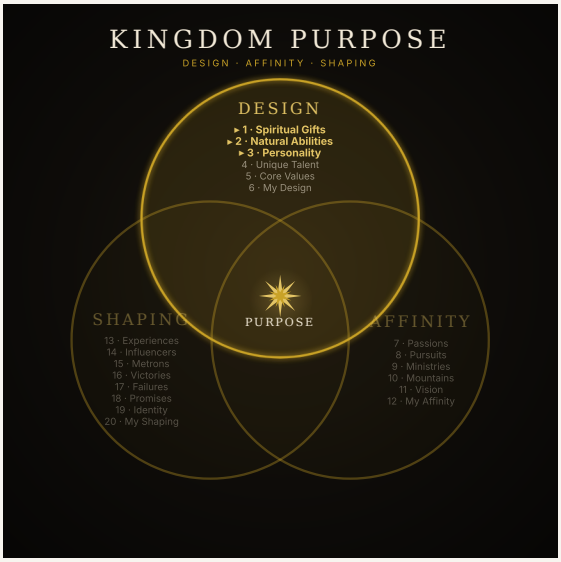
Two believers sit in the same pew every Sunday. One can walk into a room of strangers and, within ten minutes, know who is hurting and what to say to them. The other can take a tangled budget, a stalled project or a chaotic volunteer schedule and make it work by Friday. Neither of them thinks much of what they do. It comes easily, so they assume it doesn't count. Each quietly envies the other.

Both are wrong about the same thing. What comes easily to you is often the clearest evidence of what God put in you, and the ease is exactly why you walk past it.

So the question is:

What has God already put in your hands — the gifts He gave you by His Spirit, the abilities He built into you before you ever believed, and the personality through which you use them both?

This session begins the Design section of the course, and with it the Discovery Steps. You'll take three short assessments. But the assessments are the easy part. The real work is reading the results honestly, with God and with your witness, until you can say with evidence: *this is what He gave me.*



You are here: Design · Steps 1–3.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, everything I have, I received. Show me the gifts You've given me, the dramatic ones and the ordinary ones, the ones I use every day without noticing and the ones I've buried because they didn't seem important. Keep me from envying anyone else's portion, and from despising my own. I want to see what You've put in my hands. In Jesus' name, amen.

Given, Not Chosen

Your gifts were distributed by God's decision, not by your preference and not as a reward. You don't pick them, you don't earn them, and you can't trade them in for someone else's. You can only discover what you've been given and use it.

Paul makes the point three times in one chapter, each time with a different member of the Trinity:

> *"Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different results, but the same God who produces all of them*

> *in everyone… **It is one and the same Spirit, distributing as he decides to each person**, who produces all these things.”*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 12:4–6, 11**

> *“But as a matter of fact, **God has placed each of the members in the body just as he decided**.”*
>
> **1 CORINTHIANS 12:18**

“As he decides.” “Just as he decided.” The phrase is doing the same work both times. The distribution was not a lottery and not a meritocracy. It was a decision, made by Someone who knew what His body needed and where you would fit in it. That has two consequences, and you’ll need both of them this week. If God decided your gift, you have no grounds for pride about it. And if God decided your gift, you have no grounds for despising it either.

Kingdom Essentials Session 5 laid out the three families of gifts in the New Testament: the Father’s gifts in Romans 12, the Son’s gifts to the church in Ephesians 4, and the Spirit’s gifts to the one ministering in 1 Corinthians 12. It also did the word study on *charisma*, a gift given by grace. Peter adds one more word that’s worth slowing down for, because it describes the whole range at once:

> *“Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied (ποικίλης) grace of God.”*
>
> **1 PETER 4:10**

WORD STUDY

ποικίλος *poikilos* G4164

“varied” · 1 Peter 4:10

Range. Many-colored, variegated; hence of many kinds, diverse. It appears ten times in the New Testament. The Gospels use it of “various diseases” Jesus healed (Matthew 4:24), and James and Peter use it of “various trials” (James 1:2; 1 Peter 1:6).

The sense here. Of many kinds. Peter is describing God's grace as it reaches the church through individual believers: not one grace repeated, but one grace appearing in many different forms, the way white light breaks into a spectrum.

Why it carries the argument. Peter uses the same word for the trials that come at you from every direction (1 Peter 1:6) and for the grace that meets them (4:10). The church's needs come in many kinds, so God's grace does too, and it comes through people. Your gift is one color of that grace. The body needs your color precisely because it isn't anyone else's. That's why comparing gifts misses the point: nobody asks whether blue is better than red.

Source. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

Think back to the connect-the-dots picture from Session 1. Connecting the dots draws the lines of your life, but a finished picture also has color. Your gifts are some of the colors God works into your masterpiece: His one grace, broken into the particular shades He chose for you. Nobody else's picture uses exactly your palette.

Notice, too, the word *stewards*. A steward manages what belongs to someone else. Your gifts are not your property. They were entrusted to you for the benefit of others: "use it to serve one another." That means discovering your gifts is not a self-improvement project. It's finding out what you've been asked to manage.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> In the port town of Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha, also called Dorcas, who "was continually doing good deeds and acts of charity" (Acts 9:36). When she died, the believers sent for Peter. He found the upper room full of widows, "crying and showing him the tunics and other clothing Dorcas used to make while she was with them" (Acts 9:39).
>
> That is the whole of her résumé in Scripture: a needle, some cloth and a steady habit of noticing who was cold. No sermon, no office, no miracle. Yet when God raised her from the dead, "this became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord" (Acts 9:42). The gift nobody would have listed on a spiritual gifts inventory was the one that had already shaped a whole community, and God used it to open a city.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What do you do so naturally that you've never thought of it as a gift? Who would hold it up, the way the widows held up those tunics, if you were gone?

Reading Your Results

A spiritual gifts assessment gives you a list. What it can't give you is a verdict. Learning to read the list well is most of the work of Step 1.

The assessment this course uses, the free test at giftstest.com, measures twenty-two gifts. Some come straight from Romans 12 (giving, leadership, mercy, teaching, exhortation). Some come from 1 Corinthians 12 (wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues). Some come from Ephesians 4 (apostleship, evangelism, pastor/shepherd). And a few come from elsewhere in Scripture: *hospitality* (1 Peter 4:9), *craftsmanship* (the Spirit-given skill of Bezalel, Exodus 31:3) and *intercession*.

That mix is worth understanding before you take the test, for two reasons. First, no single list in the New Testament is complete. Paul names gifts in several places, and no two of his lists are the same, which suggests he was giving examples, not a catalog. Your gift may not have a tidy name. Second, the three families of gifts don't work the same way. The Father's gifts in Romans 12 tend to describe how you're wired to serve over a lifetime. Several of the Spirit's gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 are described as manifestations "given for the benefit of all" (1 Corinthians 12:7), which may come as they are needed for ministry. A high score for *healing* or *miracles* doesn't mean the same thing as a high score for *teaching*. Hold it with the same honesty: ask what you've actually seen.

Here are my own results, to show what reading them looks like in practice. My top five came back as **giving, teaching, faith, healing and prophecy**. Teaching and giving I recognized immediately; people who know me would name them before I did. Faith I could see in how I've made big decisions. Healing and prophecy I hold more carefully. They're real, but they aren't where I'd build a ministry. That's not false modesty. It's the difference between a gift with a long record of fruit and a gift God uses occasionally. Both are real. They are not the same kind of evidence.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> When twenty people from one church took this same test in early 2026, *exhortation* appeared in the top five for fourteen of them. *Discernment* and *faith* each appeared for eleven. Their natural strengths clustered the same way: *Believer*, *Deliverer* and *Empathizer* each turned up in ten or more of

their HIGH5 results. If the names on those lists were the whole answer, most of that room would have been designed alike. They weren't. By the end, their mission statements ranged from helping to build a Christ-centered refuge for the homeless, to serving behind the scenes so that families are strengthened, to helping women encounter God's love and purpose.

Two lessons follow. First, a result shared by most of the room tells you something about the room, perhaps about what that church teaches and prizes, as much as about you. Session 2 warned that these tests are sensitive to where you serve and what you've been hearing. Second, the names on your list aren't what distinguish you. The order does, and the combination, and above all the evidence: the particular times and places where the gift has actually borne fruit. That's why Step 1 asks for a line of evidence under every gift.

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That the test is unreliable and you should ignore it.
- That some gifts on the list are real and others are suspect.

WHAT I AM SAYING

- That a test result is one witness. It becomes trustworthy when your life, your witness and prayer agree with it.
- That the strongest evidence for a gift is fruit: what has actually happened when you've used it.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Before you take the test, write down the five gifts you *expect* to see. Why those five? You'll compare them with your results.

Built Before You Believed

Your natural abilities are also God's gifts. They were given at your making rather than at your conversion, but they came from the same Giver and they serve the same purpose. The Design section asks about both, because Scripture treats both as His.

Jesus built one of His best-known parables on this point:

> *"For it is like a man going on a journey, who summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one,* ***each according to his*** *ability* (δύναμιν)*. Then he went on his journey."*
>
> **MATTHEW 25:14–15**

WORD STUDY

δύναμις *dynamis* G1411

> **"ability"** · Matthew 25:15

Range. Power, strength, might; miraculous power, or a miracle itself; and, more quietly, the inherent capacity a person or thing has by nature. It occurs about 120 times in the New Testament.

The sense here. Capacity. Thayer places Matthew 25:15 under "inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature": literally, "to each according to his *own* ability." Kingdom Essentials Session 5 studied the same word in Acts 1:8, where it means the Spirit's power coming upon the disciples. Same word, different sense, and the context tells you which.

Why it carries the argument. In the parable the master doesn't hand out money at random. He looks first at what each servant is already capable of, and then entrusts accordingly. Capacity comes before assignment. That is why this course asks about your natural abilities at all: they're part of what the Master looked at before He decided

what to put in your hands. (And as with every word study, one caution: this verse doesn't tell you the *size* of your capacity is the measure of your worth. The two-talent servant received exactly the same praise as the five-talent servant, Matthew 25:21, 23.)

Source. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

Daniel is the Old Testament's clearest example of natural ability that God both gave and used. He and his three friends were chosen for the Babylonian court because they were already "well versed in all kinds of wisdom, well educated and having keen insight" (Daniel 1:4). Yet the narrator credits God for all of it: "God endowed them with knowledge and skill in all sorts of literature and wisdom" (Daniel 1:17). The ability was natural, trained and God-given, all at once. Scripture doesn't find those descriptions in tension, and neither should you.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> Johann Sebastian Bach wrote three letters at the end of every church composition he produced: *S.D.G.*, for *Soli Deo Gloria*, "to the glory of God alone." What's less often noticed is that he also wrote them on some of his secular music: dance suites, keyboard pieces, works written for a paycheck at a prince's court.
>
> Bach didn't divide his ability into a sacred portion that belonged to God and a secular portion that belonged to him. The gift for counterpoint was the same gift in the cathedral and in the concert room, and it came from the same Giver. That's the posture for Step 2. The assessment you'll take is secular; it will describe you in the language of the workplace. Read the results as Bach signed his manuscripts: this, too, is from God, and for Him.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What ability did you have before you became a Christian that you've never thought to offer to God?

WHAT ABOUT …

Aren’t spiritual gifts and natural talents really the same thing?

The objection runs like this, and it’s a serious one. *Look at Romans 12: giving, leadership, mercy, service, teaching. Those look exactly like natural personality traits. Plenty of unbelievers are generous, organized, compassionate and good at explaining things. If the “spiritual gift” of leadership looks identical to a natural talent for leadership, maybe the category is just a Christian label for ordinary human abilities. And if the gifts really are distinct, why would a Christian need to take a secular strengths test at all?*

Scripture doesn’t draw the sharp line either side of this debate would like. Some gifts plainly go beyond natural capacity: nobody is naturally gifted at healing the sick or working miracles (1 Corinthians 12:9–10). Others overlap heavily with natural ability. Paul expected the gifted leader to lead “with diligence” and the giver to give “with sincerity” (Romans 12:8), and those instructions would fit a natural talent just as well.

Here is where I land, and why. My own conviction is that the relationship varies. Sometimes the Spirit takes a capacity God built into you at birth and fills it with a new power and direction, the way He filled Bezalel’s craftsmanship “with the Spirit of God” (Exodus 31:3). Sometimes He gives what nature never supplied, and a shy believer suddenly finds they can speak God’s word with clarity. And sometimes a natural ability simply remains natural, a good gift from a good Creator, used faithfully for His glory like Bach’s dance suites. That’s why this course asks about both. If they were identical, one test would do. If they were unrelated, the overlap between your two results wouldn’t be so telling. Watch for the overlap. It’s usually where your design is clearest.

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture never gives a rule for telling a Spirit-given gift apart from a Spirit-used natural ability, and it never seems to think the distinction matters much for the person using it. Both are grace. Both are for “the benefit of all.” If you can’t tell which one you have, you’re in good company, and you can still use it.

CONSIDER THIS

Step 3 adds a third short assessment: the Enneagram, a model that describes nine basic personality types. Your spiritual gifts describe how the Spirit equips you to serve, and your strengths describe what you do well. Your personality describes how you’re wired: what drives you, what you fear, how you act under pressure. Any parent can describe the

different personalities of their children, and those differences are part of how God made each one.

Use it with your eyes open. The Enneagram's nine-pointed symbol comes from the early twentieth-century teacher G. I. Gurdjieff, and the personality types were developed later by Oscar Ichazo and Claudio Naranjo; Christian teachers adopted the model in the 1970s and after. Some Christians object to those origins, and personality researchers regard its scientific support as weak. The test site itself says it's for informational purposes. So this course uses it the way Session 2 taught you to use any test: as one witness, describing *how* you tend to operate, never as a spiritual path or a verdict on who you are. If your type rings true and your witness agrees, it will help you read your gifts and strengths. If it doesn't, set it aside.

The Turn

Everything above has been explanation. God decided your gifts, as He saw fit. They come in as many colors as the needs of the church, and each one is a stewardship, not a trophy. A test result is one witness, to be weighed by fruit. Your natural abilities are His gifts too, given before you believed and meant to be offered back to Him.

Now you find out what you've been given. Not by guessing, and not by taking a quiz once and accepting whatever it says, but by testing, waiting, retesting, praying and asking someone who knows you. Steps 1, 2 and 3 will take several days. Let them.

The Experience · Before the Tests

Before you take any of the assessments, open your Purpose Journal and make two short predictions. Write down the five spiritual gifts you expect to score highest, and the five natural strengths you think describe you best. Don't look anything up first. Just write.

Then ask your witness to do the same for you, without seeing your list: *Which five gifts and which five strengths do you see in me?* Put their lists next to yours. If you already know or suspect your Enneagram type, write that guess down too.

When your results come in, you'll have three witnesses on the page: your own expectation, your witness's observation and the assessment. Where all three agree, you've found something solid. Where they disagree, you've found something worth praying about. And where your witness names something neither you nor the test expected, you may have found your blind pane from Session 2.

DISCOVERY STEPS · STEPS 1, 2 AND 3

These are the first three of twenty-one steps. Each one tells you what to do, what to produce, what a surface answer looks like next to a deep one, and how you'll know you're done. Use the Listening Rhythm from Session 2 for each: *ask to be searched; do the work; sit with it; test it with the witnesses; sleep on it.*

STEP 1 · MY SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The prompt. *What are your spiritual gifts?*

What to do. Take the free test at giftstest.com/test. Read the description of each of your top five gifts at giftstest.com/allgifts. Then wait at least two days and take the test again. These assessments are sensitive to what you've been reading lately, where you're serving now, even the last sermon you heard, and a retake shows you which results hold steady.

What to produce. Your top five gifts, in order, each named exactly as the results page names it. Under each, copy the test's one-line description from the gift list, then add one sentence of *evidence*: a specific time, place or result where you've seen this gift at work. Mark any gift you doubt, and say why. (Copy the descriptions now, even though they feel like busywork. Step 6 will ask you to pull Steps 1–5 together, and you'll want the words in front of you, not a memory of them.)

Surface answer: *"Teaching, Giving, Faith, Leadership, Mercy."* (Pasted from the results page and done. Most of the Step 1 answers in an actual group that worked through these steps looked like this: five names, and nothing to show why.)

Deep answer: *"1. Teaching. People regularly tell me my Tuesday study made Romans make sense, and I lose track of time preparing. 2. Giving. We've given beyond*

the tithe for fifteen years, and it has never felt like loss. … 5. Mercy. I'm not sure about this one. It scored high the first time and lower on the retake, and my witness says she rarely sees it. Holding it loosely."

Worked examples.

- *The author:* Giving, Teaching, Faith, Healing, Prophecy. Teaching and giving have the longest record of fruit; healing and prophecy are real but occasional, and he holds them more loosely.
- *Participant A, a business owner who teaches:* Faith, Giving, Teaching, Leadership, Exhortation. Notice how closely his list and the author's overlap, and how differently the two men turned out to be designed once Steps 2–6 were added. The gifts are one layer, not the whole picture.
- *Another participant:* Administration, Craftsmanship, Hospitality, Mercy, Helps. Not one of her group's three most common gifts (exhortation, discernment, faith) is on her list. Her Design statement at Step 6 described someone made to give thoughtful support with the little things that make a big difference, and her gift list had said so first.

You're done when …

- [ ] You've taken the test twice, at least two days apart.
- [ ] You've read the description of each gift in your top five.
- [ ] Your top five are written in order, each named exactly as the test names it, with its one-line description copied underneath.
- [ ] Each gift has one concrete piece of evidence from your own life.
- [ ] You've marked any gift you doubt, and written why.
- [ ] Your witness has told you whether they've seen these gifts in you, and you've written their answer

down.

- [ ] You've prayed through the list and recorded anything you sensed.

Time: at least two days, because of the retake.

STEP 2 · MY NATURAL ABILITIES

The prompt. *What are you naturally strong at doing?*

What to do. Take the free HIGH5 strengths test at high5test.com. You'll need to create a free account. The test is 120 questions, untimed, and takes about fifteen to twenty minutes. The free report gives you your top five strengths with a short description of each; you don't need the paid upgrades. Before you close the page, save the report itself: download it or copy its text into your journal. A link to your results page won't open for anyone else, and it won't help you at Step 6, when you'll need the words.

What to produce. Your top five strengths, in order. For each, write four short lines: (1) the test's own description, copied word for word; (2) the description *in your own words*; (3) one example from your life, at work, at home or at church; and (4) what happens when you overuse it, because every strength has a shadow. Write this step in the language of the workplace, the way a coworker who doesn't share your faith would describe you. Your faith comes into the picture soon enough; here you're describing how you were built.

Surface answer: *"Motivating 31%, Doing 23%, Thinking 26%, Feeling 20%,"* followed by a link to the results page. (That is a real answer from an actual group that worked through these steps, and it isn't unusual. It records the four broad domains and none of the five strengths. Half the group didn't copy the descriptions either, and their facilitator had to ask, again and again, for the same thing: *paste the description of each result, because you're going to need it a few steps from now.*)

Deep answer: *“2. Deliverer. Test: ‘Deliverers follow through on their commitments and appreciate seeing how this builds more trust and respect among others. They feel terrible if promises get broken - both on the receiving and giving side.’ In my words: if I said I’d do it, it gets done, and I notice when other people’s word doesn’t hold. Example: I’m the one on our team who sends the follow-up after every meeting, and people have started waiting for it. Overused: I say yes to too much, keep every promise at the cost of sleep, and quietly resent the people who don’t.”*

Worked example.

- *The author:* Believer, Deliverer, Self-Believer, Storyteller, Philomath. Read together, they describe someone who learns constantly (Philomath), tells what he learns (Storyteller), is driven by convictions he won’t compromise (Believer) and finishes what he starts (Deliverer). That combination explains more about his teaching ministry than any single spiritual gift does.
- *Another participant:* Time Keeper, Strategist, Empathizer, Peace Keeper, Problem Solver, each recorded with its domain and the test’s full description. That is the record to keep. Everything Step 6 will need is already on the page.

You’re done when …

- [ ] You’ve taken the HIGH5 test and saved the report itself (a download or the copied text), not just a link.
- [ ] Each strength has the test’s description copied in, then your own words, a real example and its shadow, all in plain workplace language.
- [ ] You’ve compared the results with your prediction and your witness’s list from The Experience, and noted where they agree and disagree.

- [ ] You've looked for overlap with Step 1 (for example, a *teaching* gift and a *Storyteller* strength), and written down any you find.
- [ ] You've prayed through the list and recorded anything you sensed.

Time: at least one day.

STEP 3 · MY PERSONALITY

The prompt. *What characterizes your personality?*

What to do. Take the free Enneagram test at myenneagramtest.org. It takes only a few minutes, and you don't need the paid reports. Read the description of your top type and of the type with your second-highest score, then ask your witness which of the two sounds more like you. If you've already taken the Myers-Briggs or DiSC assessments, add those results too. Like the gifts test, personality tests can give different results on different days, so hold the result loosely until your witness and your own history confirm it.

What to produce. Your type (and wing, if the test gives one). Then three short lines: (1) what drives you most; (2) what you tend to fear or avoid; and (3) how your type shows up at your best and at your worst. Add one sentence on how it helps explain something in your Step 1 or Step 2 results.

Surface answer: *"Type 3."* (A number, with no evidence and no connection to anything else you've learned.)

Deep answer: *"Type 2, the Helper. Drives me: being needed. Fear: being unwanted. At my best I notice who's been left out and bring them in; at my worst I say yes to everything and resent it later. It explains why Mercy scored high on my gifts test, and why my witness laughed when I said I 'don't mind' being asked to help."*

Worked examples. The nine Enneagram types, as the test names them:

- Reformer: principled, perfection-driven
- Helper: caring, people-oriented
- Achiever: success-focused, driven
- Individualist: expressive, identity-seeking
- Investigator: analytical, private
- Loyalist: security-oriented, cautious
- Enthusiast: adventurous, pleasure-seeking
- Challenger: assertive, control-oriented
- Peacemaker: easygoing, harmony-seeking

You're done when …

- [ ] You've taken the test and read the descriptions of your top two types.
- [ ] You've written your type with its three lines: drive, fear, and best and worst.
- [ ] Your witness has said which type sounds more like you, and you've written their answer down.
- [ ] You've connected your type to at least one result from Step 1 or Step 2.
- [ ] You're holding it as one witness, not a label.

Time: at least one day.

BIG IDEAS

1. Your gifts were distributed "as he decides" (1 Corinthians 12:11). That leaves no room for pride about them, and no room for despising them.
2. God's grace is *poikilos*, many-colored (1 Peter 4:10). Your gift mix is one color the body needs, and a stewardship to manage for others, not a trophy.
3. A test result is one witness. Fruit, your witness and prayer decide how much weight it carries. The names on the list are shared by

many; the evidence under them is yours.

4. Natural abilities are God's gifts too. The master entrusted "each according to his ability" (Matthew 25:15): capacity comes before assignment.
5. The overlap between your spiritual gifts and your natural strengths is usually where your design is clearest.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You don't choose your gifts. You discover them, and then you steward them.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You decided what to give me, and You gave it on purpose. Thank You for the gifts I can already see, and for the ones I haven't recognized yet. Forgive me for the times I've envied someone else's color and neglected my own. As I take these tests, keep me honest. Show me what's real, confirm it through the people who know me, and make me a good steward of Your varied grace. Everything I have is from You, and for You. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Sam Storms, *The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (2002; rev. ed. 2013).

A clear, warm walk through each gift in the New Testament lists, from a theologian who believes all of them still operate, and the natural next read after Step 1.

Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton, *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (2001).
The secular book that launched the strengths movement behind tests like HIGH5. Read it as general revelation: a careful description of how people are made.

SUBSTANTIAL

Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (1994).
The standard exegetical treatment of every Pauline text on the Spirit and His gifts, for readers who want to test this session's claims against the Greek.

ACADEMIC

Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (1991).
Builds a whole theology of ordinary work on the Spirit's gifts, arguing that "secular" abilities are charisms too. The scholarly case for this session's What About.

LEADING THIS SESSION

This is the first session with Discovery Steps, so the group's main job is accountability, not discussion. Have everyone take Step 1's first test before the next meeting and bring their results. The predictable stall is envy and false humility at the same time: someone with *healing* or *prophecy* at the top feels awkward, someone with *helps* or *service* feels small. Read the Dorcas illustration aloud if that happens. The single most useful exercise is the witness comparison from The Experience. In pairs, have each person name two gifts they see in the other *before* either shares their test results. Group questions: *What surprised you in your results?* and *Where do your spiritual gifts and natural strengths overlap?* Two practical notes from an actual group that worked through these steps. Expect several people to share the same gifts (exhortation, discernment and faith were each in more than half the lists); use that to make the Illustration's point that the evidence, not the names, distinguishes them. And the most common problem at these steps was mechanical: about half recorded only names, a link or percentages. Ask everyone to bring the saved report and the copied descriptions to the next meeting.

> If you have questions or comments about this content, or about your personal situation, email us at feedback@thedisciplespath.com.

Next: Session 4, *Your Design*, asks the hardest question in the Design section: *what do you do better than anyone you know?* Then it asks you to name the values you won't

compromise, and to pull Steps 1–5 together into a single statement of your design.

SESSION 3 · KINGDOM PURPOSE

Your Gifts

What has God already put in your hands?



God distributes gifts “as he decides.” His grace is many-colored, and each gift is a stewardship.

1 Corinthians 12:11
1 Peter 4:10

A test result is one witness. Weigh it by fruit, your witness and prayer. The names are shared; the evidence is yours.

1 Corinthians 12:7

Natural abilities are God’s gifts too. Capacity comes before assignment.

Matthew 25:15
Daniel 1:17

SO · NOW

SO

You don’t choose your gifts. You discover them, and then you steward them.

NOW

Predict, then test: Step 1 (spiritual gifts, taken twice), Step 2 (HIGH5) and Step 3 (Enneagram), each with evidence from your life.

Discovery Steps · Steps 1, 2 and 3

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You don’t choose your gifts. You discover them, and then you steward them.

© thedisciplespath.com



YOUR DESIGN

Kingdom Purpose: Design

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 The Talent You Walk Past

03 What You Won’t Trade

04 Woven, Not Assembled

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · Ask Three People

The Question

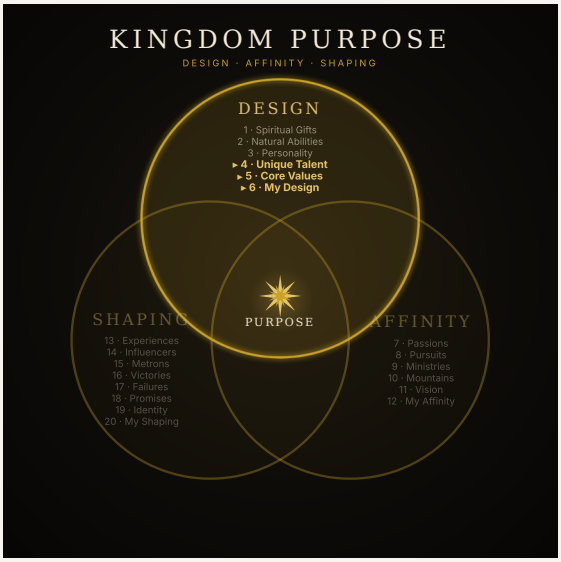
When King Saul needed a musician to calm his troubled spirit, he didn’t hold auditions. One of his attendants already knew the answer: “I have seen a son of Jesse in Bethlehem who knows how to play the lyre. He is a brave warrior and is articulate and handsome, for the Lord is with him” (1 Samuel 16:18). David was still a shepherd. He had never performed at court and had no reputation outside his own village. But someone had been watching, and that person could name exactly what David did well. That sentence became his introduction to the palace, and the palace became the road to the throne.

Most people couldn’t write that sentence about themselves. They could list their gifts and strengths from a test, but ask them what they do *better than anyone they know* and they go quiet, or they change the subject, or they say something so general that it could describe anyone.

So the question is:

What were you built to do — the talent that sets you apart, the values you won’t trade, and the single design that holds them together?

This session closes the Design section. It asks for three more steps, and the last of them is the first of the course’s three summary statements.



You are here: Design · Steps 4–6.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You didn't make me by accident, and You didn't make me in pieces. Show me the talent You put in my hands, even if I've been too proud or too timid to name it. Show me what I truly value, not what I wish I valued. Then help me see how it all fits together, the way You saw it before I was born. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Talent You Walk Past

You have at least one talent that sets you apart from the people around you, and one of the main obstacles to seeing it is religious. Many believers were taught that naming what they do well is pride. So they hide a real talent under a humble-sounding "I'm not really good at anything," and call that humility.

Scripture's first description of a person being "filled with the Spirit of God" is not a prophet or a priest. It's a craftsman:

> *"See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God in*

> *skill (חָכְמָה), in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship, to make artistic designs for work with gold, with silver, and with bronze, and with cutting and setting stone, and with cutting wood, to work in all kinds of craftsmanship."*
>
> **EXODUS 31:2–5**

WORD STUDY

חָכְמָה *ḥokmâ* H2451

> **"skill"** · Exodus 31:3

Range. Wisdom, in a wide sense: technical skill in a craft; skill in war or administration; shrewdness; and moral and religious wisdom rooted in the fear of the Lord. It occurs about 150 times, most densely in Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes.

The sense here. Technical skill: the know-how of a master craftsman in metal, stone, wood and cloth. Brown-Driver-Briggs lists these Exodus texts under that first sense. Three verses later God uses the same word again: "I have given *ability* to all the specially skilled" (Exodus 31:6), and the NET's "ability" there translates *ḥokmâ* too.

Why it carries the argument. The word Proverbs uses for the wisdom that begins with the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 9:10) is the same word Exodus uses for a craftsman's hands. Scripture doesn't rank the skill of the goldsmith below the insight of the sage. Both are *ḥokmâ*, and both are given by God: to Bezalel by His Spirit, and to "all the specially skilled" as well. Your talent, however practical, sits in that same category. It isn't a lesser, secular thing to be downplayed. It's God's wisdom in your hands.

Source. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

Two more details in Bezalel's story are worth noticing. His talent was specific: not "creative," but gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood. And God added to it: "he has put it in his heart to teach" (Exodus 35:34). A real talent is usually specific enough that you could be hired for it, and it usually overflows into helping others do it too.

Proverbs makes the practical point bluntly:

> *"Do you see a person **skilled in his work**? He will take his position before kings; he will not take his position before obscure people."*
>
> **PROVERBS 22:29**

That's what happened to David. The attendant didn't recommend him for his piety or his potential. He recommended him for a specific skill: "knows how to play the lyre." The skill put David in the room.

ILLUSTRATION

In an actual group that worked through these steps, this was the question people found hardest to answer straight. Some deflated: "I've always had a heart to encourage people. I don't know that I do it better than anyone else, but, I try." Others answered a different question. One man named a calling: "I serve those less fortunate. That's what God made me to do." Another named something he does in worship. Both answers were true, and both will matter later in this course. Neither was a talent. A talent is *what* you do and how well. *For whom* you do it is a question for the Affinity section.

The answers that rang truest were as concrete as David's lyre. One woman who works with cancer patients wrote: "Knowing how to approach my patients, in different places in their cancer battle. How to match their need with our interaction." Another could spot the red flag in a hiring decision that everyone else on the team had missed. Neither of them would have called that a gift. Both of their coworkers would have.

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That your talent makes you more valuable to God than someone else, or that the point of naming it is to feel good about yourself.
- That every talent is spiritual or has to be used in a church to count.

WHAT I AM SAYING

- That refusing to name a talent God gave you is not humility. It’s a failure to acknowledge the Giver.
- That naming it honestly, and giving Him the glory for it, is the humble thing to do.

PAUSE & REFLECT

If someone who has watched you work were asked to recommend you, the way Saul’s attendant recommended David, what specific skill would they name?

What You Won’t Trade

Your core values are the principles you won’t compromise, even when compromise would be easier or more profitable. They’re not the values you admire. They’re the ones you actually live by, and the surest way to find them is to look at what you’ve done when holding to them cost you something.

> *“The one who conducts himself in integrity (תֹּם) will live securely, but the one who behaves perversely will be found out.”*
>
> **PROVERBS 10:9**

WORD STUDY

תֹּם *tōm* H8537

> **“integrity”** · Proverbs 10:9

Range. Completeness, fullness; innocence or simplicity; integrity of character. It occurs about two dozen times in the Hebrew Bible.

The sense here. Moral integrity: a life that is one piece, the same in private as in public. The proverb sets it against the person who "behaves perversely," literally makes his ways crooked, and says the crooked life "will be found out." What's hidden will eventually show.

Why it carries the argument. *Tōm* explains why this step asks what others can see. A value you truly hold makes a life whole, and wholeness is visible over time. People who know you well can usually name your real values more accurately than you can, because they've watched what you do when it costs you. And if the values you *claim* and the values you *live* are different, that gap is exactly what the proverb says will be "found out." This step is a chance to find it out first.

Source. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

Values show up under pressure. When Daniel arrived in Babylon as a young captive, surrounded by the most powerful court on earth and offered its finest food, "Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the royal delicacies or the royal wine" (Daniel 1:8). Nobody would have blamed him for eating. That's exactly why the refusal told everyone, including Daniel, what he valued.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> You met Eric Liddell in Session 1. His most famous decision is also the clearest picture of a core value in this course. He was the favorite in the 100 metres at the 1924 Paris Olympics, and the heats fell on a Sunday. He didn't run. He had known the schedule for months, and he chose to train instead for the 400 metres, a race he had a far weaker chance of winning.
>
> Nobody who watched Liddell decide that needed him to fill out a values inventory. The decision was the inventory. Honoring the Lord's Day was worth more to him than his best event at the Olympics, and everyone could see it. Your values have left the same kind of evidence behind. Step 5 asks you to find it.

Expect two things when you make your own list. The first is that you'll want to keep too many. In the same group, seven of twenty people listed more than five

core values, and one listed sixteen, a few of them twice. Every one was a good value. But a list that long can't settle a hard decision, because it never tells you which value wins when two of them pull in different directions. The second is that some of what you list will be values you *admire* rather than values you *live*. One woman named the problem herself: "Honestly, this is hard to answer because I want all of these values to be who I am." That's an honest sentence, and it's exactly why Step 5 asks for evidence. Notice too what nobody in that group wrote: a single story of what a value had cost them. The prompt they answered didn't ask. This one does.

Values aren't only discovered; they're also given. God promised through Ezekiel, "I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you… I will put my Spirit within you; I will take the initiative and you will obey my statutes" (Ezekiel 36:26–27). Some of what you value now you didn't value before you knew Him. That's not a problem for this step. It's part of your design.

PAUSE & REFLECT

When has holding to a principle cost you something: money, a promotion, a relationship, a win? What does that choice say you value?

Woven, Not Assembled

Your design is not a pile of parts but a pattern, and the last step of this section asks you to see the pattern. Five steps, four sets of results and dozens of words in your journal are meant to become one short statement that sounds like you.

The psalmist describes his own making in craftsman's language:

> *"Certainly you made my mind and heart; you wove me together in my mother's womb. I will give you thanks because your deeds are awesome and amazing. You knew me thoroughly; my bones were not hidden from you, when I was made in secret and sewed together* (רָקַמְתִּי) *in the depths of the earth."*

PSALM 139:13–15

WORD STUDY

רָקַם *rāqam* H7551

> **"sewed together"** · Psalm 139:15

Range. To variegate with color; to embroider or weave with colored threads. It occurs only nine times. Eight are in Exodus, describing the embroidered hangings, sashes and screens of the tabernacle (Exodus 26:36; 27:16; 28:39; 35:35; 36:37; 38:18, 23; 39:29).

The sense here. Skilled, colored needlework. The ninth occurrence is here, where David uses the tabernacle embroiderer's word for God's making of a human being.

Why it carries the argument. Look where the word appears in Exodus 35:35: in the description of Bezalel's team, God "has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as craftsmen, as designers, as embroiderers." The vocabulary of the finest craftsmanship in Israel's worship is the vocabulary David reaches for when he describes God making *him*. You weren't assembled from spare parts. You were embroidered: many colored threads, worked into one intended pattern. Step 6 asks you to trace the pattern.

Source. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

It's the same picture you've been drawing since Session 1, seen more closely. The dots and lines are your life's path; the colored threads are your design. Blue, purple and scarlet were the embroiderers' colors in the tabernacle (Exodus 35:35), and God chose yours just as deliberately. Your gifts, strengths, talent and values are the palette of your masterpiece. Step 6 asks you to name it.

Finding a pattern takes stepping back. When you reread your first five steps, look for the threads that run through more than one of them: the same verb showing up in your gifts and your strengths, a talent your values explain, a strength your witness keeps naming. Those repeated threads are your design.

One instruction in Step 6 may surprise you. For this statement, set your faith aside for a moment. That doesn't mean God is absent from your design; He is its author. It means the Design statement describes *what you are built to do*, in plain terms that would be true in any setting, not *where* you'll do it or *for whom*. A design statement that says "I'm designed to serve in children's ministry" has skipped ahead to a question the Affinity section will ask. "I'm designed to explain hard things simply to people who are new to them" is a design, and it might be lived out in a children's ministry, a classroom, a software company or a hospital.

This is the instruction people miss most. In an actual group that worked through these steps, the coach wrote some version of it to six different people at this step: *take your Christianity out of your thinking for now; what would someone who knows nothing about your faith say you do exceptionally well?* The first drafts sounded like "God designed me to love and encourage people," which is true of every believer and describes none of them. One woman, asked to try again, began her revision, "Oof, ok, let me revise that aside from my faith (that feels so weird to write)." Her second draft was the clearest thing she wrote in the whole section: that she was designed to connect with people, with "a pretty good intuition of how they like or need to be approached to make them feel more at ease, welcomed, comforted, heard, encouraged." Setting her faith aside for one sentence didn't take God out of her design. It let her see what He had actually made.

Sometimes someone else sees it first. Another woman wrote that she had never really sat down and thought about her talents, though she had always been able to get up and keep going when life knocked her down. Her coach handed that back to her as a sentence: "You have an internal grit that won't give up, won't make excuses, and won't be beaten." That's what a witness is for.

CONSIDER THIS

If you kept your Purpose Journal electronically, as Session 1 suggested, you can use an AI tool (Claude, ChatGPT or similar) to help you see the pattern. Write your own first draft before you do; that's the first of Session 2's four rules for using AI honestly. Then copy your answers to Steps 1–5 and paste them in after this prompt:

"I'm working through a discipleship course on discovering my God-given design. Below are my answers to five steps: my top five spiritual gifts, my top five natural strengths, my Enneagram personality type, my unique talent, and my three core values, with the evidence I wrote for each. Please (1) point out words, themes or abilities that repeat across the four answers; (2) note anything that seems to contradict something else; and (3) offer three different drafts of a design statement of 50 words or less, each beginning 'I'm designed to…'. Describe what I do and how I do it, not a job title or a ministry role. Don't flatter me. If the evidence for something is thin, say so."

Treat what comes back the way Session 2 taught you: as a mirror, not a witness. It can only organize what you gave it. Take one draft, or none,

and rewrite it until it sounds like you. If any sentence still says “you” or uses a word you’d never say, it isn’t yours yet.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Reading back through Steps 1–3, what word or ability shows up more than once?

WHAT ABOUT …

What if I honestly can’t think of anything I’m good at?

Some readers reach Step 4 and stall completely. The objection isn’t theological; it’s personal, and it deserves a real answer. *Everyone keeps saying I have a talent. I’ve looked, and I don’t see one. I’m average at everything. The tests gave me results, but they could describe anybody. Maybe some people are just ordinary.* One woman in that group put it in a single line: “This is a tough question because I don’t have one specific thing I do better.”

CAUTION

If the sense that you’re good at nothing is heavy and constant, and it comes with hopelessness, trouble sleeping, or a feeling that your life doesn’t matter, please treat that seriously. Talk with someone you trust, and consider seeing a pastor, a counselor or your doctor. That isn’t a lack of faith. It’s wisdom, and this course can wait while you get the help you need.

For most people, though, the problem isn't a lack of talent. It's that the talent is invisible to its owner, for three reasons. First, a real talent feels easy, so you assume everyone can do it. The person who can calm an angry customer in two minutes rarely notices that nobody else in the office can. Second, you're comparing yourself with the best person you know in each area, rather than asking what you do better than *most* people you know. Step 4 asks what you do better than anyone you know, but it's fine to start with "better than most." Third, the talent may not look like one because it isn't glamorous. Dorcas's needle (Session 3) wouldn't have made a list of impressive gifts either.

So don't start by searching yourself. Start by asking others, which is what The Experience below is for. And remember Gideon, hiding in a winepress and describing himself as "the youngest in my family" in the weakest clan in Manasseh (Judges 6:15). God's view of him was different: "The Lord is with you, courageous warrior!" (6:12). Your own assessment of yourself is the least reliable one in the room. Session 2 made that case, and it applies here with full force.

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture never promises that anyone's talent will be rare or impressive by the world's standards. The one-talent servant in Jesus' parable really did receive less than the others (Matthew 25:15). What Scripture does promise is that what you were given was given on purpose, and that faithfulness with it is praised in exactly the same words, whatever its size (Matthew 25:21, 23).

The Turn

Everything above has been explanation. Your talent is *ḥokmâ*, God's wisdom in your hands, and naming it honestly is humility, not pride. Your values are visible in what they've cost you, and the people around you can usually see them. And your design is not a pile of results but a pattern, embroidered on purpose, waiting to be traced.

Now it's time to trace it. Three steps finish the Design section. The last one will ask for fifty words that you, and the people who know you best, can read and say: *yes, that's how God made this person.*

The Experience · Ask Three People

Before you start Step 4, send a short message to three people who know you well: your witness plus two others who have seen you at work, at home or in ministry. Choose at least one who knows you outside church. Ask exactly this:

"I'm working through a course on discovering how God designed me. One question is: what do I do better than anyone you know? Please be specific, and please be honest. I'd rather hear something small and true than something big and flattering."

Write their answers in your journal word for word, without arguing with them. Some will surprise you. If two people independently name something close to the same thing, pay attention: that's the kind of confirmation Session 2 called *two or three witnesses*.

DISCOVERY STEPS · STEPS 4, 5 AND 6

Use the Listening Rhythm for each step: *ask to be searched; do the work; sit with it; test it with the witnesses; sleep on it.*

STEP 4 · MY UNIQUE TALENT

The prompt. *In 25 words or less, what do you do better than anyone you know?*

What to do. Start with the three answers from The Experience. Then ask yourself: *What do I enjoy that others find tedious or overwhelming? What would my parents say I've always been good at?* Draft three versions, then choose the truest one. Answer with a talent, not a calling, a spiritual discipline or a virtue every Christian is meant to have; those all have their own steps later. Then test the draft in the other direction: *Is this narrower than the truth?* When one man wrote that he masters new technology faster than anyone he knows, his coach asked whether that was really about technology or about how he learns anything.

What to produce. One sentence of 25 words or less, with a specific verb and a specific object, followed by two or three short pieces of evidence (what the three people said, plus one real example).

Surface answer: *"I've always had a heart to encourage people. I don't know that I do it better than*

anyone else, but, I try." (A real answer, and a sincere one. It names a desire rather than a skill, and the second sentence takes back the first. That's false humility, and it hides the talent the step is looking for.)

Deep answer: *"I can walk into a stalled project, find the one bottleneck everyone else missed, and get the team moving again within a week."* (Evidence: two of three people named it independently; I did it with the church building committee in 2023.)

Worked examples.

- *Dave (the author):* "I can absorb and synthesize large amounts of information and teach effectively in various settings."
- *Participant A:* "Vision casting: helping people see their preferred future and keeping the long-term view in focus; communicating complex things in simple ways."
- *Other participants:* "I can manage lots of task details effortlessly." · "I easily strike up conversations with strangers everywhere I go." · "I learn, understand and master new technology faster than anyone I know." · "I have an intuitive combination of discernment and analysis of fine detail that spots red flags, especially in hiring and team decisions." · "Knowing how to approach my patients, in different places in their cancer battle, and how to match their need with our interaction." · "I can talk to anyone. Those society might overlook, I see and engage with."

You're done when …

- [ ] Your sentence is 25 words or fewer.
- [ ] It has a specific verb and object; someone could hire you for it.
- [ ] At least two people, independently, named something close to it.

- [ ] It isn’t spiritualized. It would be true at work, at home or at church.
- [ ] You’ve asked whether it’s narrower than the truth, and widened it if it was.
- [ ] You can say it out loud, and thank God for it, without either shrinking it or inflating it.

Time: at least two days, to give the three people time to answer.

STEP 5 · MY CORE VALUES

The prompt. *What are your core guiding values or principles?*

What to do. Start with this list of twenty-nine biblical values, or download it with Scripture references for each (PDF):

Love · Faith · Hope · Holiness · Integrity/Honesty · Humility · Obedience · Justice · Mercy · Forgiveness · Grace · Servanthood/Service · Compassion · Generosity · Stewardship · Diligence/Hard Work · Wisdom · Self-Control/Discipline · Patience/Perseverance · Peace · Courage · Truth · Gratitude/Thankfulness · Unity · Purity · Kindness · Accountability · Family · Evangelism/Discipleship

Narrow the list by halves. Compare the first two and keep the one that matters more to you; then the next two; and so on down the list. Do the same with the survivors, and again, until you have about four. Then choose and rank your top three. You may substitute a value that isn’t on the list.

What to produce. Your three core values, ranked. Under each, one sentence describing a specific time when holding to it *cost* you something.

Surface answer: *“Love, integrity, honesty, mercy, forgiveness, servanthood, compassion, truth, thankfulness, accountability, kindness.”* (A real list

from that group. Every value on it is biblical, and eleven of them can't guide a single decision. Notice also that *integrity* is on it. In that group it was on twelve of twenty lists, which is good news about the group and a reason to ask what your version of it has cost you.)

Deep answer: *"1. Integrity/Honesty. I walked away from a partnership when I was asked to shade the numbers for an investor, and it cost us the deal. 2. …"*

Worked examples.

- *Dave (the author):* Integrity/Honesty · Stewardship · Discipleship.
- *Participant A* began with seven: Trust God · Don't give up · Biblical/Stewardship worldview · Integrity · Honor · Faithfulness · Kindness. That's a common first draft. Every one of them is good, and seven is too many to guide a decision. The halving method is how you get from seven to three.
- *Another participant* grouped related values and added two that aren't on the list: Integrity/Honesty/Fairness · Craft/Creativity · Balance · Community/Connection. Substituting is allowed, and her list sounds like no one else's.
- *Another* wrote her values as commitments rather than nouns, ending with: "To give EVERYTHING (to have left nothing on the field when I die)." If a value comes more naturally to you as a sentence, write the sentence, then name the value it holds.

You're done when …

- [ ] You have exactly three values, ranked.
- [ ] Each one has a real story of what holding to it cost you.
- [ ] Your witness, asked "What do you think I value most?", named at least one of your three.
- [ ] You've honestly asked whether any of the three is a value you *admire* rather than one you *live*.

Time: at least one day.

STEP 6 · MY DESIGN

The prompt. *Using your answers to Steps 1–5, how would you summarize your design in 50 words or less?*

What to do. Reread Steps 1–5 in one sitting. Underline every word or ability that appears in more than one step. Draft three versions of a statement beginning *"I'm designed to…"*. If you like, use the AI prompt in *Consider This* above to see patterns you missed, then rewrite in your own words. Set your faith aside for this statement: describe *what* you're built to do, not where or for whom. Read your best draft to your witness and ask, *"Is this me?"*

What to produce. One statement, 50 words or less, beginning *"I'm designed to…"*.

Surface answer: *"I believe God designed me to love and encourage people."* (A real answer. It is true of every believer who has ever lived, so it tells you nothing about this one. It also skips the instruction to set faith aside for this statement, the most common miss at this step.)

Deep answer: *"I'm designed to take complicated, messy situations, see the few things that actually matter, and explain them so clearly that people can act, one-on-one or in front of a room."*

Worked examples.

- *Dave (the author):* "I'm designed to consume volumes of resources and synthesize them into effective teaching material."
- *Participant A:* "I'm designed to help people visualize the future and plan steps to accomplish big God-given goals."
- *Other participants:* "I am designed to help people think through the technological problems or needs

facing them and provide solutions with uncompromising speed and excellence.” · “I am designed to bring people together and to help them recognize that all of our differences are actually beneficial and necessary.” · “I’m designed to connect with people, with a pretty good intuition of how they like or need to be approached to make them feel more at ease, welcomed, comforted, heard, encouraged.” (Each is specific enough that the people who know the writer would recognize it, and none of them is a job title.)

You’re done when …

- [ ] Your statement is 50 words or fewer and begins “I’m designed to…”.
- [ ] You can trace it back to at least three of Steps 1–5.
- [ ] It describes what you do and how, not a job title or a ministry role.
- [ ] Your witness read it and said, in effect, “That’s you.”
- [ ] You slept on it, reread it, and it still rings true, what Session 1 called *drawn up out of deep water*.
- [ ] Nobody else you know could sign it unchanged.

Time: at least two days. This is the first of the course’s three summary statements. Don’t rush it.

A note on the values list: the downloadable version, with three or four Scripture references for each value, will be available from this course’s page on thedisciplespath.com.

BIG IDEAS

1. Refusing to name a talent God gave you isn’t humility. Naming it honestly, and giving Him the glory, is.

2. A craftsman's skill and a sage's wisdom are the same word in Scripture, *ḥokmâ*, and both are God's gift (Exodus 31:3, 6).
3. Your real values are the ones you've paid for. A life of *tōm*, integrity, is whole enough that others can see what you value.
4. You were embroidered, not assembled (Psalm 139:15). Your design is a pattern of threads that run through your gifts, strengths, talent and values.
5. A design statement says what you're built to do, specifically enough that nobody else could sign it unchanged.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You weren't assembled from spare parts.
You were embroidered on purpose.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You wove me together, and You knew what You were making. Thank You for the skill You put in my hands. Forgive me for hiding it and calling that humility. Show me which values I truly live by, and where the values I claim have drifted from the ones I practice. As I write my design statement, let it be true, not flattering and not small. And whatever You've built me to do, I give it back to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Dorothy L. Sayers, “Why Work?” (1942).

A short, sharp essay arguing that a Christian’s first duty to their work is to do it well, because the work itself serves God. The best companion to Bezalel.

SUBSTANTIAL

Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work* (2012).

How ordinary skill and work fit into God’s purposes, with direct help for anyone who suspects their talent is “only” secular.

ACADEMIC

Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (1991).

Recommended again from Session 3, because its argument that the Spirit gifts people for all kinds of work is the scholarly foundation for this session’s word study on ḥokmâ.

LEADING THIS SESSION

This session is a practice, and its most important moment happens outside the room: the three messages in The Experience. Ask everyone to send them before the group meets again. In the group, the predictable stall is Step 4's discomfort with naming a talent. Break it by going around the circle and having each person name a talent they've seen in the person to their left. Be specific, and keep it only positive. Watch for anyone for whom the *What About* lands heavily. If someone seems not just modest but hopeless, follow up privately, and take the Caution seriously. Group questions: *What did your three people say?* and *Read your draft design statement aloud. What does the group hear in it?* Three predictable misses from an actual group that worked through these steps: at Step 4, answers that name a calling or a spiritual practice instead of a talent; at Step 5, lists of eight to sixteen values with no evidence of cost; at Step 6, statements that describe every Christian ("God designed me to love and encourage people"). The coach's most useful question at Step 6 was, *What would someone who knows nothing about your faith say you do exceptionally well?* And when someone is stuck, do what that coach did: hand them back a sentence built from their own words, and let them correct it.

> If you have questions or comments about this content, or about your personal situation, email us at feedback@thedisciplespath.com.

Next: With your Design statement written, the course turns from your hands to your heart. Session 5, *Your*

Heart, begins the Affinity section with two questions: *What breaks your heart?* and *What fills it back up?*

SESSION 4 · KINGDOM PURPOSE

Your Design

What were you built to do?



Skill is *ḥokmâ*, God's wisdom in your hands. Naming it honestly is humility, not pride.

Exodus 31:3
Proverbs 22:29

Real values are the ones you've paid for, and people who know you can see them.

Proverbs 10:9
Daniel 1:8

You were embroidered on purpose. Trace the threads that run through all five steps.

Psalm 139:13–15
Exodus 35:35

SO · NOW

SO

You weren't assembled from spare parts. You were embroidered on purpose.

NOW

Ask three people, then complete Step 4 (talent), Step 5 (values) and Step 6 (your Design statement).

Discovery Steps · Steps 4, 5 and 6

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You weren't assembled from spare parts. You were embroidered on purpose.

© thedisciplespath.com



YOUR HEART

Kingdom Purpose: Affinity

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Hearts Formed on Purpose

03 What Breaks Your Heart

04 What Fills You Back Up

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · The Calendar Test

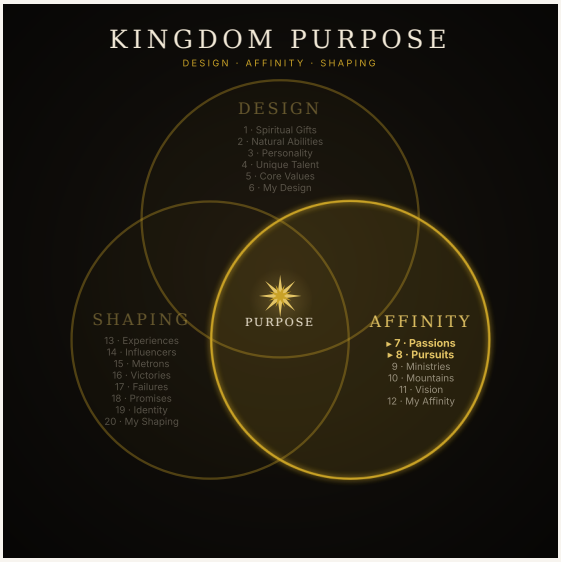
The Question

Put the same news feed in front of ten believers and watch where their eyes stop. One lingers on the story about children in foster care. Another skips it and reads every word about a church split. A third can’t get past the report on addiction in her county. A fourth closes the app and goes straight to the business section. None of them is more spiritual than the others. Each of them is being tugged by something, and most of them have never asked why.

The Design section asked what God built into your hands. The Affinity section asks what He set in your heart: what you’re drawn to, what moves you and what fills you back up. Your design says what you *can* do. Your affinity says what you *care* to do it for.

So the question is:

What breaks your heart, and what fills it back up — and what if neither one is an accident?



You are here: Affinity · Steps 7–8.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You formed my heart, and You know why it reacts the way it does. Show me which of my reactions are Yours: the grief You put there on purpose, the anger that's really a longing for things to be made right, the joy that tells me I'm doing what You made me for. Sort out what's only my flesh from what's Your fingerprint. In Jesus' name, amen.

Hearts Formed on Purpose

God forms each human heart individually, and the particular things that move you are part of His design. That's the claim this section defends. It matters, because many believers assume their sympathies are random, or that they ought to care equally about everything, and they feel guilty when they don't.

> *"He is the one who forms (הַיֹּצֵר) every human heart, and takes note of all their actions."*
>
> **PSALM 33:15**

WORD STUDY

יָצַר *yāṣar* H3335

> **"forms"** · Psalm 33:15

Range. To form, fashion or shape, especially as a potter shapes clay. It is the verb of Genesis 2:7 ("the Lord God formed the man from the soil of the ground") and of the potter's workshop in Jeremiah 18, where the participle simply means *the potter*. It occurs about 63 times.

The sense here. God as the potter of the inner life. The psalm has just pictured the Lord looking down from heaven on "all the inhabitants of the earth" (Psalm 33:14). Then it narrows to each one: He "forms every human heart." The heart here is the center of the person, where desire, thought and will live.

Why it carries the argument. A potter doesn't make every vessel the same. He shapes each one for its use. If God forms each heart as a potter forms a pot, then the particular shape of yours (what draws you, what grieves you, what you can't stop thinking about) is part of the workmanship, not a defect in it. That means the book's instruction is exactly right: don't judge another believer's lack of emotional response to *your* cause, and don't condemn yourself for not feeling everything everyone else feels. Different vessels, different uses.

Source. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

That doesn't mean every feeling you have is holy. Hearts are formed by God and also bent by the Fall, and Session 2 has already reminded you that the heart is hard to read from the inside (Jeremiah 17:9). But it does mean the *pattern* of what moves you, sustained over years, is worth taking seriously as evidence.

ILLUSTRATION

In 1948 a young English social worker named Cicely Saunders sat at the bedside of a patient named David Tasma. He was a Polish-Jewish refugee who had escaped the Warsaw Ghetto, and he was dying of cancer, alone, in a

busy London hospital that had little idea how to care for someone it could no longer cure. When he died, he left her £500, to be, in his words, “a window in your home.”

Saunders couldn’t let go of what she had seen. She had already trained as a nurse; now, to change how the dying were treated, she went back to school and qualified as a physician in 1957, at a time when few women did. In 1967 she opened St Christopher’s Hospice in London, the world’s first purpose-built modern hospice, and the model for the hospice movement that followed. A single bedside broke her heart. Nineteen years later, that heartbreak had a building, and a window in it.

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That believers can be indifferent to suffering outside their own passion, or that “it’s not my calling” excuses walking past someone in need.
- That every strong emotion you feel is a call from God.

WHAT I AM SAYING

- That God shapes hearts differently on purpose, so that the whole body carries every burden without every member carrying every burden alone.
- That the sustained pattern of what moves you, over years, is evidence of how He shaped you.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Whose lack of concern for *your* cause have you quietly judged? What if God simply shaped them for a different burden?

What Breaks Your Heart

The effects of the Fall that move you to act, and not just to feel, often point toward the part of the world God wants to mend through you. Jesus Himself was moved this way, and Matthew shows us what He did with it.

> *"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη) on them because they were bewildered and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.'"*
>
> **MATTHEW 9:36–38**

WORD STUDY

σπλαγχνίζομαι *splanchnizomai* G4697

> **"had compassion"** · Matthew 9:36

Range. To be moved with compassion; to feel pity from the depths. The verb comes from *splanchna*, the inward parts, which Thayer notes "gradually came to denote the seat of the affections." It occurs twelve times, all of them in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

The sense here. A deep, visceral response to the condition of the crowds, a compassion felt, not merely decided. In the Gospels the word is used almost entirely of Jesus, and of a few characters in His parables, like the Samaritan who stops for the wounded man (Luke 10:33) and the father who sees his lost son coming home (Luke 15:20).

Why it carries the argument. In the Gospels this compassion never stays a feeling. It's the hinge between *seeing* and *acting*: Jesus is moved, and then He heals, feeds, teaches or sends. Here, He tells the disciples to pray for workers, and a few verses later "Jesus sent out these twelve" (Matthew 10:5). The people told to pray for workers became the answer to their own prayer. That's the

pattern of a God-given passion: it moves you in the gut, and then it moves you out the door.

Source. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

Not all of Jesus' deep responses looked like tenderness. In a synagogue, faced with religious leaders more concerned with a Sabbath rule than a man's withered hand, "he looked around at them in anger, grieved by the hardness of their hearts" (Mark 3:5). Anger and grief together, and then healing. Some of your passion may show up first as anger. The question is whether it's the kind of anger that wants to *mend* something.

You've already seen this pattern in Nehemiah (Session 1): a report about Jerusalem's broken walls, and "I sat down abruptly, crying and mourning for several days" (Nehemiah 1:4). You've seen it in Moses, too, in its rawest form. Long before he was ready, "he went out to his people and observed their hard labor" (Exodus 2:11), and his heart broke so hard that he drew the stray line of Session 1: he killed a man. The passion was real and God-given. The timing and the method were his own. Forty years later God sent him back to the same people, carrying the same burden, now ready.

CONSIDER THIS

Hot buttons are useful clues, but read them carefully. We tend to *react soulishly* rather than *respond faithfully* when someone pushes our passion button. A reaction is heat without direction. A response asks, *What would help?* As you work Step 7, notice which of your hot buttons produce only outrage and which produce a desire to do something. The second kind is the better evidence.

Don't be ashamed if a reaction is what you find first. In an actual group that worked through these steps, one woman admitted that what she felt about people stuck in addiction was frustration, "when they know better." That was a reaction, and she was honest enough to name it. By the vision step it had become a plan: a house for people coming out of incarceration, most of them with a history of addiction, and a curriculum she wanted to rewrite around God's truth. The reaction had been pointing at a response all along.

ILLUSTRATION

The same group's answers to Step 7 fell into a few familiar shapes. Six of twenty named harm done to children or to the innocent. Four named people living under lies about who they are. If those categories were the whole answer, everyone in each cluster would share a purpose. They didn't, because

the strongest answers went past the category to particular people. One man named “physically- or developmentally-disabled people being mistreated or lacking adequate support.” One woman paired each heartbreak with the pull it created in her: “I am drawn to protect people that are vulnerable… I am drawn to bring clarity where there is confusion (my heart breaks with misunderstandings).”

Two other kinds of answer show what this step is *not* asking. Some people reflected on the Fall itself: Adam and Eve’s choice, and their own share in it. That’s good theology, and it isn’t this step. Others listed their own losses: a death in the family, a long illness, a job that ended. Those matter deeply, and Session 8 will come back to them, because your own wounds often explain your passions. But Step 7 asks which of the Fall’s effects *in the world around you* stop you, and whom you want to help because of them.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What kind of news story do you always stop to read? When you do, do you mostly feel angry, or do you find yourself wishing you could help?

What Fills You Back Up

Some activities drain other people and fill you, even when they leave you physically tired. That difference is not a measure of your devotion. It’s a clue to your design. Scripture shows it in two scenes, one in David’s army and one at a well in Samaria.

When Amalekite raiders burned the town of Ziklag and carried off the families of David’s men, David set out after them with six hundred men. At the Wadi Besor, “two hundred men who were too exhausted to cross the Wadi Besor stayed there,” while David and four hundred others went on (1 Samuel 30:10). The same assignment, under the same blessing, emptied some men and drove others forward. And when the others came back victorious, some of them wanted to deny the exhausted two hundred their share. David refused: “The portion of the one who went down into the battle will be the same as the portion of the one who remained with the equipment!” (1 Samuel 30:24). Being energized by the chase didn’t make the four hundred better servants. It made them different ones.

The second scene is Jesus at Jacob's well. John notes that "Jesus, since he was tired from the journey, sat right down beside the well" (John 4:6). By the time the disciples came back from town with food, He had spent the afternoon in one of the most significant conversations of His ministry, with a Samaritan woman whose whole town would soon come out to meet Him. The disciples urged Him to eat. His answer:

> *"I have food to eat that you know nothing about…* ***My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work.****"*
>
> **JOHN 4:32, 34**

Jesus arrived tired and left fed. Doing the Father's work, the particular work in front of Him, restored Him in a way lunch couldn't. That's what Step 8 is looking for: not only what *rests* you (though that matters too), but what you can do for hours, come home physically spent, and still feel more alive than when you started.

In an actual group that worked through these steps, about half answered Step 8 only with ways they rest or worship: music, hiking, walks, reading, time alone with God. Every one of those matters, and some, like worship, may be the most important hours of your week. But rest restores everyone, so it can't tell you much about what *you* are for. The answers that pointed somewhere named something the person *does*. "I love identifying inefficient tools or processes and building new systems that lead to tangible improvements for peoples' work or daily lives," wrote one man. One woman who now leads a ministry to the elderly traced her joy in it back to volunteering at a hospital as a teenager, where the staff kept placing her with elderly patients "because they said I got along well and was patient with them."

And one woman found her answer while she was writing it. After describing worship and writing, she added a line she hadn't planned: "Doing the behind the scenes work, set up, prep work, the simple things I can do to contribute to the whole and make me feel like I belong." Then, in parentheses: "Wow, that's something Holy Spirit just popped out on me." That is what the third move of the Listening Rhythm, *sit with it*, is for.

Frederick Buechner put the two halves of this session together in one sentence that has been quoted ever since:

"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

Frederick Buechner · Presbyterian minister and novelist · *Wishful Thinking*, 1973

In the picture you've been drawing since Session 1, your design supplied the colors. Your heart supplies their intensity. Your passions and pursuits show where the color runs deepest, the places where the Artist pressed hardest on the pencil. But deep color marks *where* your picture is concentrated, not how much you're worth. David gave the two hundred who stayed at the Wadi Besor exactly the same portion as the four hundred who pressed on (1 Samuel 30:24).

Step 7 looks for the world's deep hunger that moves you. Step 8 looks for your deep gladness. The Affinity statement you'll write in Session 7 will look for where they meet.

PAUSE & REFLECT

After what kind of day do you come home tired *and* happy? What were you doing?

WHAT ABOUT …

If something drains me, does that mean it isn't my calling?

The objection deserves a straight answer because a wrong answer can do damage in both directions. *If God made me for something, shouldn't it energize me? Some teachers say that when you're on the right path, burnout just doesn't happen. So when I'm exhausted by a ministry, isn't that proof I'm in the wrong one? And if I'm not supposed to feel drained, what does it mean that I'm drained so often?* One woman in an actual group that worked through these steps asked it about her own children's ministry: "I love teaching my Littles but do admit to sometimes getting a little burnt out doing it every Sunday, but I dont think that disqualifies it?"

Scripture won't support the strong version of that claim. Jeremiah was unmistakably called. He was also worn out by the call: "his message becomes like a fire locked up inside of me… I grow weary of trying to hold it in; I cannot contain it" (Jeremiah 20:9). Paul, in the center of his assignment, listed "many sleepless nights," hunger and cold, and "the daily pressure on me of my anxious concern for all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:27–28). Jesus Himself sat down at the well *tired* (John 4:6). A true calling can exhaust you.

What Step 8 is looking for is a different distinction: whether an activity *costs* you energy or *drains* you of it. A calling costs energy the way a good workout does: you're spent, but something in you is stronger for it, and you want to go back. A mismatch drains you: the tiredness comes with dread, the work gives nothing back, and rest doesn't restore the desire to return. Most people can feel the difference once they've named it. The woman with the Littles had already answered her own question: she loved them, and she was tired. That's the first kind. Exhaustion can also have nothing to do with fit: a season, a crisis, grief, illness, overwork in the right role. If you're chronically worn out, don't diagnose it only through this course. Talk to someone who knows you, and take care of your body; Elijah's recovery, remember, began with sleep and a meal (1 Kings 19:5–8).

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture doesn't give a rule for deciding when a draining assignment should be endured and when it should be laid down. Jeremiah stayed. Paul and Barnabas parted ways over a ministry decision (Acts 15:39). What Scripture does give you is the rest of this course: your design, your witness, the evidence of fruit and the voice of the Spirit. Weigh the drain alongside those. It's one witness, not a verdict.

The Turn

Everything above has been explanation. God forms each heart like a potter forms a vessel, and the sustained pattern of what moves you is part of His design. Compassion that comes from Him moves you in the gut and then out the door. And the activities that fill you back up, even when they tire you, are clues to what you were made to do, while exhaustion by itself is not a verdict.

Now you start listening to your own heart on purpose. Hearts are slower to read than test results, so the next two steps take more days than the last five. Give them the time.

The Experience · The Calendar Test

Open your calendar for the last four weeks, or reconstruct it from memory if you don't keep one. Beside every meeting, task, commitment and free block, put a mark: + if you came out of it with more energy than you went in with, − if you came out with less, and = if it made no difference.

Then look at the pluses. What do they have in common? Is it people or tasks? Building or fixing? Teaching or learning? Leading or serving? Planning or

improvising? Outdoors or in? Look at the minuses the same way. Write down any pattern you see in three or four sentences. Step 8 will start from this page.

DISCOVERY STEPS · STEPS 7 AND 8

These open the Affinity section. Use the Listening Rhythm for each step: *ask to be searched; do the work; sit with it; test it with the witnesses; sleep on it.*

STEP 7 · MY PASSIONS

The prompt. *What breaks your heart? What effects of the Fall trigger an emotional response in you?*

What to do. For three days, keep a short log. Every time a news story, a conversation, a scene or a memory stops you and stirs you, write one line: what it was, and what you felt (grief, anger, longing, compassion). On the fourth day, read the log and group what you've written. Then ask your witness: *"What have you seen me get fired up about over the years?"* Finally, for each group, ask yourself the Consider This question: *does this only make me react, or does it make me want to help?* Keep the step pointed outward. Your own losses belong in Session 8; here, name the people or situations in the world that you're drawn to help.

What to produce. Three to five passions, ranked from strongest emotional response to weakest. Write each as *"I am drawn to [people or situation]…"*, followed by one sentence about a time you acted on it, or badly wanted to.

Surface answer: *"Literally all of it. I go online or turn on the news and I can't look at it for more than a couple of minutes before I am overwhelmed with so many different emotions that I can't keep them straight."* (A real answer, and an honest one. The Fall really is everywhere. But a heart that breaks for everything can't

yet tell you where to go. The three-day log is how you find out which of “all of it” stops you most.)

Deep answer: *“1. I’m drawn to kids aging out of foster care with nobody to call when things go wrong. I read every story about it, and I’ve sat with two of them through a first apartment lease. 2. …”*

Worked examples.

- *Participant A:* People separated from God and at risk of eternity without Him · Believers bound in spiritual chains · People deceived by the love of money into living for materialism rather than God · Believers and families who don’t know or apply God’s word, and so never grow or bear fruit · Under-privileged and at-risk children.
- *Other participants:* “I am drawn to children who are abused.” · “I am drawn to people suffering from the effects of poor stewardship or a poverty mentality.” · “I am drawn to people in bondage to lies and deception.” · “I am drawn to ministering to those affected by substance abuse.”
- *Another participant*, pairing each pull with the heartbreak behind it: “I am drawn to protect people that are vulnerable… I am drawn to situations where [I can] balance what is uneven (my heart breaks with unfairness). I am drawn to bring clarity where there is confusion (my heart breaks with misunderstandings).” (That format is worth borrowing.)

You’re done when …

- [ ] You’ve kept the three-day log and grouped what you found.
- [ ] Your passions are ranked from strongest response to weakest, three to five of them.
- [ ] Each one names specific people or a specific situation, not a general virtue.

- [ ] Each has a real moment when you acted on it, or wanted to.
- [ ] Your witness has told you what they've seen you get fired up about, and you've compared it with your list.
- [ ] You've asked of each one: *reaction, or response?*

Time: at least four days, because of the log.

STEP 8 · MY PURSUITS

The prompt. *What activities recharge your emotional and spiritual batteries?*

What to do. Start with the pluses from The Calendar Test. Add anything that didn't show up in four weeks but always fills you when it happens: a retreat, a mission trip, a project at work. Then ask yourself: *What do I find myself thanking God for, over and over?* Separate the activities that *rest* you (a walk, a nap, time with friends) from the ones that *fill* you while they cost you effort. Both are worth knowing, but the second kind says more about your purpose. Answer about yourself, not about recharging in general: a list of ways Christians are supposed to refill their batteries tells you nothing about yours.

What to produce. Three to five statements beginning *"I love…"*. At least two must be activities you *do* for others or produce, not only ways you rest. Under each, one sentence of evidence: when you last did it, and how you felt afterward.

Surface answer: *"Fishing and disc golf and pray walking and hiking."* (A real answer. All four are good, and all four rest him. None of them is something he does for anyone else, so the list can't yet point toward an assignment. His later steps showed a man whose heart was set on the homeless; a deeper Step 8 would have found that thread here.)

Deep answer: *"I love taking a mess nobody wants, like a disorganized closet, a confused spreadsheet or a stalled volunteer team, and leaving it working. I'm physically tired afterward and happier than when I started. Last time: reorganizing the food pantry in March."*

Worked examples.

- *Dave (the author):* "I love preparing for and delivering discipleship content."
- *Participant A:* Time in the Bible, prayer and worship · Time in fellowship with his wife, friends and Christian community · Time in nature, in forests, mountains and by water. (All three are real, and all three rest him. A deeper answer would add at least one thing he *does* that fills him. Look at his Design statement in Session 4 and you can guess what it is.)
- *Other participants:* "I love creating organization out of chaos." · "I love meeting new people and carrying on a conversation everywhere I go." · "I love exposing demonic lies and presenting truth to those deceived by the enemy." · "I love identifying inefficient tools or processes and building new systems that lead to tangible improvements for peoples' work or daily lives." · "I love speaking with people about their issues and helping them walk through them in a Biblical way."
- *Another participant,* answering the "thanking God" question: "Seeing my work add value to projects and assignments leads me to express gratitude to God."

You're done when …

- [ ] You've finished The Calendar Test, with its written pattern.
- [ ] You have three to five "I love…" statements, each with recent evidence.
- [ ] At least two are *doing* activities, not only rest.

- [ ] You've compared your list with your Design statement from Step 6 and noted where they overlap.
- [ ] You've slept on it and reread it, and it still sounds like you.

Time: at least two days.

BIG IDEAS

1. God forms each heart as a potter forms a vessel (Psalm 33:15). The sustained pattern of what moves you is part of His design, not an accident.
2. God-given compassion moves you in the gut and then out the door. Jesus' disciples were told to pray for workers, and then they were sent (Matthew 9:36–10:5).
3. Watch the difference between reacting and responding. Outrage without a desire to help is weaker evidence than a burden that wants to mend something.
4. What fills you back up, even when it tires you, is a clue to your design. The four hundred and the two hundred received the same portion (1 Samuel 30:24).
5. A calling can exhaust you. Exhaustion by itself is not a verdict; weigh it alongside your design, your witness and the fruit.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

What breaks your heart and what fills it back up are both in God's handwriting.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You shaped my heart like a potter shapes clay, and You meant its shape. Thank You for the things You've made me grieve and the things You've made me love. Turn my reactions into responses, and my compassion into action. Show me where my gladness meets the world's hunger. When I'm tired, feed me the way You fed Jesus at the well, with the joy of doing Your will. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (1973; rev. ed. *A Seeker's ABC*, 1993).
Short, witty, one-page entries on Christian words. The entry on "Vocation," quoted in this session, is a one-minute read worth a week of reflection.

SUBSTANTIAL

Shirley du Boulay, *Cicely Saunders: The Founder of the Modern Hospice Movement* (1984; updated with Marianne Rankin, 2007).
The full story behind this session's illustration: how one burden, carried for twenty years, reshaped care for the dying around the world.

ACADEMIC

Matthew A. Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament* (2006).
A careful study of emotion language in the New Testament, including compassion, anger and joy, and a corrective to the idea that feelings are spiritually irrelevant.

LEADING THIS SESSION

This session opens the Affinity section, and it moves from test results to self-observation, which some people find harder. Keep the group focused on patterns, not single feelings. The predictable stall is guilt: someone realizes they don't feel much about a cause the group cares about, and assumes that means they're hard-hearted. Read the *yāṣar* word study and the What I Am Not Saying aloud. In pairs, have people share their three-day logs from Step 7 and help each other sort *reaction* from *response*. Group questions: *What news story always stops you?* and *What did The Calendar Test show you?* Three predictable misses from an actual group that worked through these steps: at Step 7, answers that reflect on the Fall as doctrine, or list the person's own losses, instead of naming whom they want to help; at Step 7 again, "all of it"; and at Step 8, about half the group listing only ways they rest. Ask each person for one thing they *do* that fills them. If someone's passion comes out as frustration, don't correct it. Ask what they wish would happen instead; the answer is often the response hiding inside the reaction.

> If you have questions or comments about this content, or about your personal situation, email us at feedback@thedisciplespath.com.

Next: Session 6, *Your Arena*, asks where your heart has already been at work, in the ministries you've served in, and where it's being drawn next: which of society's "mountains" of influence you're built to climb.

SESSION 5 · KINGDOM PURPOSE

Your Heart

What breaks your heart, and what fills it back up?



God forms each heart as a potter forms a vessel. What moves you is part of His design.

Psalm 33:15

God-given compassion moves you in the gut, then out the door.

Matthew 9:36–38
Mark 3:5

Some work tires you and feeds you at once. That's a clue to your design.

1 Samuel 30:10, 24
John 4:34

SO · NOW

SO

What breaks your heart and what fills it back up are both in God's handwriting.

NOW

Take The Calendar Test, keep a three-day passion log, then complete Step 7 (passions) and Step 8 (pursuits).

Discovery Steps · Steps 7 and 8

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

What breaks your heart and what fills it back up are both in God's handwriting.

© thedisciplespath.com



YOUR ARENA

Kingdom Purpose: Affinity

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Where You've Served

03 Beyond the Church Walls

04 The Seven Mountains

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · Where Your Week Goes

The Question

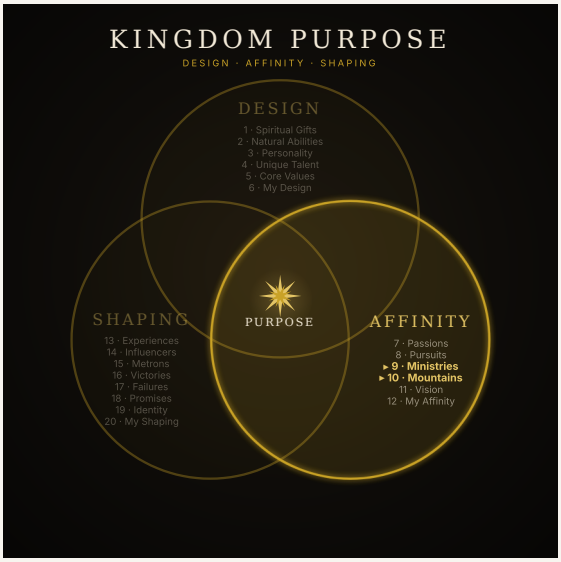
In 1785 a twenty-six-year-old member of Parliament named William Wilberforce went through a deep conversion, and almost immediately concluded that he should leave politics. Serious Christians, he assumed, went into the ministry. He went to talk it over with John Newton, the former slave-ship captain turned pastor who had written "Amazing Grace." Newton told him to stay where he was. God, Newton believed, could use him in Parliament.

Wilberforce stayed. Two years later he wrote in his diary, "God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the Slave Trade and the Reformation of Manners." The first of those objects took twenty years. Parliament abolished the British slave trade in 1807, and in July 1833, three days before he died, Wilberforce learned that slavery itself would be abolished across the British Empire.

He almost left the arena he was built for, because he assumed God's work happened somewhere else.

So the question is:

Where has God already had you serve, and which arena of the world is He drawing you into next?



You are here: Affinity · Steps 9–10.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, the whole earth is Yours: the church and the marketplace, the classroom and the courtroom, the studio and the kitchen table. Show me where You've already had me serve, and what I learned there. Show me the arena You're drawing my heart toward. Keep me from assuming Your work only happens in one building. In Jesus' name, amen.

Where You've Served

The ministries you've been drawn to, and the ones you've stayed with, are evidence of how God shaped your heart. They're a record of your affinity in action, and they often show a trajectory you couldn't see while you were in it.

Paul gives every believer the same basic assignment: "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity to indulge your flesh, but through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13). *Serve one another* is universal. *Where* and *how* you serve is where your affinity shows. The earliest church learned this in a crisis over food.

> *"Now in those days, when the disciples were growing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Greek-speaking Jews against the native Hebraic Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution* (διακονίᾳ) *of food. So the twelve called the whole group of the disciples together and said, 'It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to wait on tables… But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the* ***ministry*** *of the word.'"*
>
> **ACTS 6:1–2, 4**

WORD STUDY

διακονία *diakonia* G1248

"distribution" · Acts 6:1

Range. Service or ministry of any kind: especially the service of those who carry out another's commands, the practical care of the poor, and the office and work of ministry. It occurs thirty-four times in the New Testament.

The sense here. In Acts 6:1 it means the practical service of distributing food to widows; Thayer glosses it as "the supplying or distributing of charities." Three verses later, in 6:4, the apostles use the same word for their own work: "the *ministry* of the word." The verb in between, "to wait on tables" (6:2), comes from the same root.

Why it carries the argument. Luke uses one word for serving meals and for preaching Scripture. The apostles weren't saying food distribution was beneath them. They were saying it was a different *diakonia*, and it needed different people. That's the point of Step 9: the church doesn't have first-class ministries and second-class ones. It has different kinds of service, and your history shows which kind your heart keeps choosing.

Source. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

ILLUSTRATION

One of the seven men chosen to handle the food distribution was named Philip (Acts 6:5). He started as a table-server. Two chapters later, when persecution scattered the church, "Philip went down to the main city of Samaria and began proclaiming the Christ to them" (Acts 8:5), and crowds listened. God sent him down a desert road to explain Isaiah to an Ethiopian official (Acts 8:26–38), and afterward he preached "to all the towns until he came to Caesarea" (Acts 8:40). Twenty years later, when Paul's ship put in at Caesarea, Luke describes the house they stayed in: "the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven" (Acts 21:8).

Philip didn't abandon his first assignment for a better one. He served where he was put, and his faithfulness there became a path. By the end of his story he had a title, *evangelist*, but Luke never lets us forget where he started: "one of the seven." Your list of past ministries may show you the same kind of path.

Your list will probably hold two kinds of service, and it's worth telling them apart. One woman in an actual group that worked through these steps put the difference precisely. She had served in children's ministry at various times, she wrote, "based on need of the church," and she had learned a great deal there about relating to kids and managing volunteers. Then: "My heart really is drawn to freedom and prayer ministries. I love to see people break free and realize their true identity." Both kinds of service were faithful. Only the second was evidence of her affinity.

Sometimes the list corrects an assumption you've carried for years. A man in the same group wrote that when he was younger he thought he was called to be a pulpit minister. "But I discovered that the ministry I am called for isn't behind the pulpit but rather the streets where I have spent the largest part of my life."

A word of caution about what you'll leave off your list. An earlier version of this material recommended omitting ministry experiences that were negative or emotionally draining, because "those are outside your purpose." That's worth refining. Sometimes a hard ministry was simply the wrong fit, and that's useful to know. But sometimes it was the right ministry in a hard season, or a good ministry led badly. Session 5 made the case that a calling can exhaust you.

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That every ministry you disliked was outside God's purpose for you.
- That you should keep serving somewhere that consistently drains you and bears no fruit.

WHAT I AM SAYING

- That a draining ministry is data, not a verdict. Ask *why* it drained you: the role, the season, the leadership or the fit.
- That the ministries you keep returning to, and that keep bearing fruit, are strong evidence of your affinity.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Looking back over every place you've served, is there a thread? What kind of *diakonia* do you keep choosing?

Beyond the Church Walls

Your arena may not be inside the church at all. Scripture treats faithful work in the wider world as service to God, and some of the most important Kingdom work in history was done by people who never held a church office.

When Judah was carried into exile in Babylon, the false prophets told the exiles to keep their bags packed. Jeremiah sent them a very different message from God:

> *"Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat what they produce… Work to see that the city where I sent you as exiles enjoys peace and prosperity (שָׁלוֹם). Pray to the Lord for it. For as it prospers you will prosper."*
>
> **JEREMIAH 29:5, 7**

WORD STUDY

שָׁלוֹם *šālôm* H7965

> **“peace and prosperity”** · Jeremiah 29:7

Range. Completeness; soundness and safety; welfare, health and prosperity; peace and quiet. Brown-Driver-Briggs lists all four senses. It occurs more than two hundred times in the Hebrew Bible.

The sense here. The welfare of a whole city: its safety, its flourishing, its common good. The NET needs two English words, “peace and prosperity,” to carry it. The Hebrew of verse 7 uses *šālôm* three times: seek the city’s *šālôm*, for in its *šālôm* you will have *šālôm*.

Why it carries the argument. God didn’t tell the exiles to withdraw from Babylon, and He didn’t tell them to take it over. He told them to seek its *šālôm*: to work and pray for the flourishing of a pagan city from inside it. That’s the model for every believer whose arena is outside the church. Daniel lived it: he rose to “authority over the entire province of Babylon” (Daniel 2:48) without ever compromising his faith. Your work in business, education, government, medicine or the arts can be exactly this: seeking the *šālôm* of the place God has put you.

Source. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Strong’s Concordance via Bible Hub.

Paul says the same thing to slaves in Colossae, people with no say over where they worked: “Whatever you are doing, work at it with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not for people, because you know that you will receive your inheritance from the Lord as the reward. Serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23–24). If a slave’s work could be service to Christ, so can yours. And Jesus described every one of His followers, not only the ordained ones, as “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world,” placed so that people “can see your good deeds and give honor to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:13–16). Salt only works where it’s rubbed in. Light only works where it’s dark.

In the same group, some of the clearest answers to Step 9 came from people who counted work outside the church. One woman described fifteen years of helping families navigate a complicated legal system, and called it ministry. A retired pastor wrote that the job he may have loved most wasn’t a pastorate but managing a loan center, where he could lead his staff “with the heart of Jesus.” A newer believer with little church ministry to list looked at her work instead. Consulting

at a psychiatric hospital, and helping families learn to manage their finances, pointed her toward people struggling with mental illness and with money. And when one woman wondered which church ministry would finally feel like home, her coach told her to keep trying things, then added: “But keep in mind your purpose most likely isn’t found in church, but rather outside the church.”

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where do you spend most of your waking hours? Have you ever thought of that place as your arena of service rather than a distraction from it?

The Seven Mountains

To help believers see the whole range of arenas God works in, a widely used framework names seven spheres that shape every society, often called the *seven mountains of influence*. Step 10 asks which of them you’re drawn to.

The framework’s origin story is well known. In 1975 two of the most influential evangelical leaders of the twentieth century, Loren Cunningham, the founder of Youth With A Mission, and Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, met in Colorado. As Cunningham told it for decades afterward, each of them had independently sensed God giving him the same list: seven areas of society that shape how people think and live, where Christians should go with the gospel. Cunningham treated the list as a strategy for the Great Commission. Jesus commanded His followers to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), and a nation, Cunningham reasoned, is shaped by more than its churches.

The seven are usually named this way:

MOUNTAIN	WHAT IT SHAPES	A FEW OF THE PEOPLE WHO SERVE THERE
Family	How people are raised, loved and formed	Parents, grandparents, foster and adoptive families, marriage mentors
Religion (the church)	How people understand God and worship Him	Pastors, missionaries, volunteers, church staff, disciplers
Education	What people learn and how they think	Teachers, professors, tutors, administrators, homeschooling parents
Government	Laws, justice and the common order	Public servants, lawmakers, judges, police, military, voters who engage
Media	What people hear and believe about the world	Journalists, writers, producers, podcasters
Arts & Entertainment	What people imagine, love and celebrate	Artists, musicians, filmmakers, designers, athletes
Business (the economy)	Provision, work and wealth	Owners, managers, employees, investors, entrepreneurs

In recent years Johnny Enlow has developed the framework further, most recently in *Kingdom Come* (2024). He argues that God's Kingdom was always meant to fill every sphere of life, and that believers are God's agents for bringing His rule and character into each one. Seven-mountains advocates read Daniel 2:44 the

same way: the “kingdoms” God’s everlasting kingdom will outlast are not merely nations but the foundations of power and influence in every nation. Most commentators read the kingdoms of Daniel 2 as the four empires of Nebuchadnezzar’s statue, and the seven-spheres framework doesn’t depend on that verse. It rests on a simpler conviction: that Jesus’ authority extends over “all nations” (Matthew 28:19), and so over every part of their life.

In the language of the picture you’ve been drawing since Session 1, your arena is where the deepest colors of your picture meet the world around you: the part of the canvas where your design and your heart are put to work.

When an actual group that worked through these steps answered Step 10, two mountains led by a wide margin: Family and the church, each named by eleven of twenty people. That’s no surprise. They’re the two mountains every believer already stands on. For some people one of them really is the arena. For many, though, they’re where everyone stands, and the arena lies beyond them. The answers that told the most went further and gave a reason. One woman named family first, then business, “because of what I have seen… and how I want to have a business that’s complete opposite of what I’ve seen.” Another weighed media, because “it bothers me all the misinformation and lies that are spread,” and chose business instead, where she already leads teams. Half the group named three mountains or more. The mountains you admire and the one you’re sent to aren’t always the same, and Step 10 asks you to tell them apart.

That’s the purpose of Step 10. You’re not choosing a mountain to *conquer*. You’re recognizing the arena where your design and your heart are most likely to seek someone’s *šālôm*.

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn’t “Seven Mountains” just Christian dominionism?

This criticism is common, serious and made by thoughtful people, including many evangelicals. At full strength it goes like this. *Whatever its origins, the “Seven Mountain Mandate” has become a movement about power. Later leaders reframed Cunningham’s evangelistic map as a call to take control of society’s institutions: C. Peter Wagner’s* Dominion! *(2008) urged Christians to seize authoritative control of the culture, and Lance Wallnau and Bill Johnson’s* Invading Babylon *(2013) framed it as a campaign to conquer. Journalists and scholars of religion have linked the movement to the New Apostolic Reformation and to Christian nationalism, and some advocates describe political opponents as being under demonic influence. That isn’t Jeremiah 29. It’s closer to what Jesus refused when Satan offered Him the kingdoms of the world.*

Much of that should be acknowledged plainly. The drift from *influence* to *dominion* is real, and it’s documented. Some of the language used by later advocates, of seizing, conquering and taking the mountains, goes well beyond what Cunningham described. Cunningham himself stayed out of politics and saw

the seven spheres as a framework for evangelism and discipleship. That's the sense in which this course uses them.

Here is where I land, and why. My own conviction is that Scripture calls believers to carry God's character into every sphere of life, and that His Kingdom is advancing, not retreating (Kingdom Essentials Session 8). But the *method* Scripture gives is the method of salt, light and *šālôm*: "good deeds" that lead people to "give honor to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16), work done "as to the Lord" (Colossians 3:23), and service that seeks the flourishing of the city (Jeremiah 29:7). Joseph and Daniel rose to the top of pagan governments, and both did it by serving the kings over them with excellence and integrity, never by coercion. Influence that comes from serving well is the kind this course is asking you to pursue.

> **WHAT I AM NOT SAYING**
>
> - That Christians should aim to control society's institutions, or treat people who disagree as enemies.
> - That believers should stay out of government, media or any other sphere to avoid being misunderstood.
>
> **WHAT I AM SAYING**
>
> - That every sphere of life belongs to God, and He places His people in all of them.
> - That the Kingdom advances in each sphere the way salt and light do: through faithful, excellent service that seeks the good of others.

Where this stays unresolved. Christians who share a high view of Scripture disagree about how much transformation of society to expect before Christ returns, and so about how to think of cultural influence at all. Those differences run through eschatology, and Kingdom Essentials takes up that question separately. Scripture doesn't give a strategy for "taking" any cultural sphere. It gives a way of living inside each one. Step 10 asks only which sphere you're drawn to; the How belongs to the rest of the course.

The Turn

Everything above has been explanation. The ministries you've been drawn to show how your heart has already served, and faithfulness in one place, like Philip's, often becomes a path to the next. Your arena may lie far outside the church, where believers are sent to seek the *šālôm* of the places God puts them. And the seven mountains are a map of those places, used here the way they were first given: as a guide to where you're sent to serve, not a list of territory to take.

Now you draw your own map. First, where you've been. Then, where you're being drawn.

The Experience · Where Your Week Goes

Take a typical week and roughly sort your waking hours into the seven mountains: family, religion (church), education, government, media, arts and entertainment, and business. Count work, volunteering, caregiving and even the hours you spend consuming media. Write the approximate hours beside each.

Then answer three questions in your journal. Which mountain gets most of your hours? Which one gets most of your *heart*? (Look back at your Step 7 passions and see which mountains they live in.) And if those two answers are different, what does that tell you?

DISCOVERY STEPS · STEPS 9 AND 10

Use the Listening Rhythm for each step: *ask to be searched; do the work; sit with it; test it with the witnesses; sleep on it.*

STEP 9 · MY MINISTRIES

The prompt. *What ministries have you been part of? What types of ministries do you gravitate toward?*

What to do. List every place you've served, inside the church and outside it: formal roles and informal ones, long and short, including serving in your home, neighborhood or workplace. Beside each, write three quick notes: *energized or drained?*, *fruit I saw*, and *would I do it again?* For anything that drained you, add

one word for *why*: role, season, leadership or fit. Mark which roles you took *because the church needed someone* and which you took *because your heart pulled you there*. If you haven't served much in a church yet, don't stop: list your work, your volunteering and the needs you've met at home, and read those for the pattern instead.

What to produce. Your full list, then the two or three kinds of ministry you gravitate toward, each with one sentence saying why. Add one ministry you left, and what it taught you.

Surface answer: *"Homeless ministry and prayer ministry."* (A real answer, and both entries turned out to matter: his later steps were built around a shelter for the homeless. But two names with no story, no fruit and no "why" leave the pattern for someone else to find.)

Deep answer: *"I gravitate toward helping people take a first step: I've been a greeter, led newcomers' lunches and sponsored new believers at baptism, and each time I came home energized. I left the finance committee after two years. The role was fine, but it was all spreadsheets and no people, and I dreaded every meeting."*

Worked examples.

- *Participant A:* Finance · Altar call ministry · Men's ministry · Family discipleship. (Notice how directly these match his passions in Step 7: money, freedom, families and the people far from God.)
- *Other participants:* Family ministries · Stewardship · Children's church · Local outreach to the homeless.
- *Another participant*, separating need from pull: "Children's ministry at various times. Those were based on need of the church and I learned quite a bit about how to relate to kids and manage volunteers. My heart really is drawn to freedom and prayer ministries."

– *Another,* with little church history to list: security team (and why she enjoys it); consulting at a psychiatric hospital, which "wasn't as draining as I thought it might be"; and helping people take "tangible steps" with their finances. Her list didn't need a church title to show a pattern.

You're done when …

- [ ] Your list includes places you served outside the church, not only inside it.
- [ ] Every entry has its three notes, and every draining one has a *why*.
- [ ] You've marked which roles you took because of a need and which because of a pull.
- [ ] You've named the two or three kinds of ministry you gravitate toward, with reasons.
- [ ] You've named one ministry you left and what it taught you.
- [ ] You've looked for the thread connecting this step with your passions (Step 7) and pursuits (Step 8).

Time: at least one day; two if your history is long.

STEP 10 · MY MOUNTAINS

The prompt. *Which of the seven mountains of influence do you feel drawn to?* They are Family, Religion (the church), Education, Government, Media, Arts & Entertainment, and Business (the economy).

What to do. Start with The Experience: where your hours go and where your heart goes. Look at your Step 7 passions and note which mountain each lives in. Then ask yourself: *If money and time were no object, which of these arenas would I walk into tomorrow?* Ask your witness which mountain they'd put you on.

What to produce. Your primary mountain, and a secondary one if two are genuinely close, each with one

sentence saying why. Add one sentence describing where you already stand on that mountain today.

Surface answer: *"Family and the church."* (A real answer, and the most common one in an actual group that worked through these steps. Every believer stands on both mountains. Without a reason, the answer can't show whether either one is the arena you're sent into.)

Deep answer: *"Education. My passions are all about kids who fall through the cracks, my best volunteer years were tutoring, and when I read the news, the school stories are the ones I can't let go. Today I'm on it as a parent and a Sunday school teacher. I wonder whether God wants more."*

Worked examples.

- "I'm drawn to Church and Education."
- "I'm drawn to impact public policy." (Government)
- "I'm drawn to raise the next generation of Christians." (Education, and Family)
- "I'm definitely drawn to the influence of family first and foremost… [and] to business because of what I have seen… and how I want to have a business that's complete opposite of what I've seen." (A primary, a secondary, and a reason for each.)
- "I think business mainly… It could also be media because how much it bothers me all the misinformation and lies that are spread, I just never had any influence in that area. I think I can bring more influence at my jobs, the teams I lead." (Weighing two mountains honestly, and choosing the one where she already stands.)

You're done when …

- [ ] You've done The Experience and compared where your hours go with where your heart goes.

- [ ] You've named one primary mountain (and at most one secondary), each with a reason.
- [ ] Your reason connects to your Step 7 passions, not only to your current job.
- [ ] You've written where you already stand on that mountain.
- [ ] Your witness has said which mountain they'd put you on, and you've noted whether you agree.

Time: at least one day.

BIG IDEAS

1. Serving meals and preaching Scripture are both *diakonia* (Acts 6:1, 4). The church has different kinds of service, not first- and second-class ones.
2. Faithfulness in one place often becomes a path to the next: Philip was "one of the seven" before he was "the evangelist."
3. A draining ministry is data, not a verdict. Ask why it drained you.
4. God sends His people to seek the *šālôm* of the places He puts them, including places far outside the church (Jeremiah 29:7).
5. The seven mountains are a map of where you're sent to serve, not a list of territory to take. The Kingdom advances there as salt and light do.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Every arena belongs to God, and He sends His people into all of them to seek their good.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for every place You've already let me serve, the ones that filled me and the ones that taught me. Show me the thread running through them. Show me the arena You're drawing my heart toward, whether it's inside the church or far outside it. Wherever You send me, make me salt and light. Let me seek the good of that place, the way You told Your people to seek the good of Babylon. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Loren Cunningham with Janice Rogers, *Is That Really You, God? Hearing the Voice of God* (1984; rev. ed. 2001).
The founder of YWAM on learning to hear God's voice, from one of the two men at the 1975 meeting.

SUBSTANTIAL

Johnny Enlow, *Kingdom Come: Understanding the Reign of God on Earth* (2024).
The fullest recent statement of the seven-mountains view from one of its leading advocates, and the book this course's research draws on.

ACADEMIC

James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (2010).
A sociologist's sympathetic but searching critique of Christian strategies for changing culture, proposing "faithful presence" instead. Read it alongside Enlow to hear both sides of this session's What About.

LEADING THIS SESSION

This is a practice session, but the *What About* may generate more heat than any other in the course so far, because “Seven Mountains” has become politically charged. Name that openly, read the What I Am Not Saying aloud, and keep the group on Step 10’s actual question: *where are you sent to serve?* Don’t let it become a debate about elections. The most productive exercise is The Experience: have people share where their hours go and where their heart goes, and listen for the gap. Group questions: *What thread runs through the places you’ve served?* and *Which mountain would you walk into tomorrow if nothing stood in the way?* Three predictable misses from an actual group that worked through these steps: at Step 9, a bare list of ministry names with no “why”; at Step 9 again, newer believers who think they have nothing to list (point them to their work and home); and at Step 10, naming three or four mountains, most often including Family and the church, with no reason for any of them. Ask each person: *If you could only climb one, which, and why?* Watch for anyone who reads “Family” as “the people I love most”; the mountain is the arena of how families are formed, not a ranking of affections.

> If you have questions or comments about this content, or about your personal situation, email us at feedback@thedisciplespath.com.

Next: Session 7, *Your Vision*, asks the biggest question in the Affinity section, *if you had unlimited time and resources, what would you dream of accomplishing for*

the Kingdom?, and then asks you to write your Affinity statement.

SESSION 6 · KINGDOM PURPOSE

Your Arena

Where has God had you serve, and where is He drawing you next?



Where You've Served

Serving tables and preaching are both *diakonia*. Your history shows which kind of service your heart keeps choosing.

Acts 6:1–4
Acts 21:8

Beyond the Church Walls

God sends His people to seek the *šālôm* of the places He puts them.

Jeremiah 29:7
Colossians 3:23–24

The Seven Mountains

A map of where you're sent to serve, not territory to take.

Matthew 28:19
Matthew 5:13–16

SO · NOW

SO

Every arena belongs to God, and He sends His people into all of them to seek their good.

NOW

Map where your week goes, then complete Step 9 (your ministries) and Step 10 (your mountain).

Discovery Steps · Steps 9 and 10

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Every arena belongs to God, and He sends His people into all of them to seek their good.

© thedisciplespath.com



YOUR VISION

Kingdom Purpose: Affinity

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Write It Down

03 A Desire He Puts There

04 Naming Your Affinity

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · The Dreams You Set Down

The Question

On a Sunday morning in June 1865, a thirty-three-year-old missionary named Hudson Taylor was in church in Brighton, on the south coast of England, and found he couldn't bear to stay. He had come home from China five years earlier in poor health, and he couldn't get the country's inland provinces out of his mind: eleven of them, with millions of people and not one missionary among them. He later wrote that he was "unable to bear the sight of a congregation of a thousand or more Christian people rejoicing in their own security, while millions were perishing for lack of knowledge." So he walked out onto the beach alone, "in great spiritual agony."

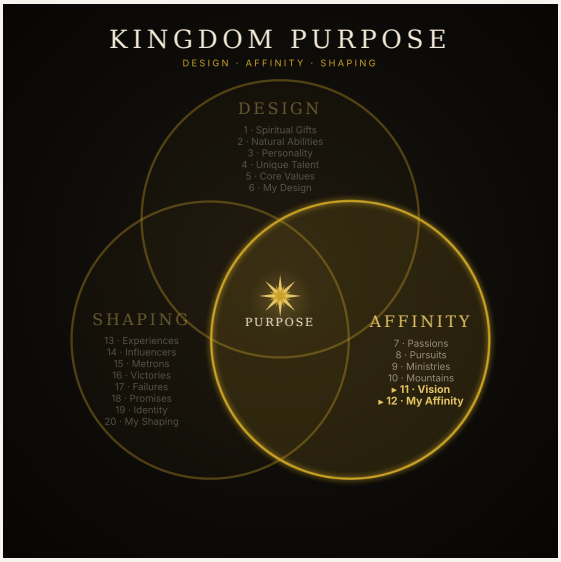
There on the sand he asked God for twenty-four workers, "two for each of eleven inland provinces which were without a missionary, and two for Mongolia," and he wrote the request in the margin of his Bible. Then, he said, "I returned home with a heart enjoying rest such as it had been a stranger to for months."

Within a year Taylor sailed for China with sixteen new missionaries, the largest group that had ever arrived there at one time. By 1910 the mission he started that summer had more than eight hundred.

Taylor didn't have the money, the organization or the people. What he had was a picture he couldn't shake, and the nerve to write it down.

So the question is:

If you knew God was in it, what would you dare to attempt for His Kingdom?



You are here: Affinity · Steps 11–12.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You are able to do far beyond anything I can ask or imagine. Show me the dreams You've put in my heart, including the ones I set down years ago because they seemed too big. Cleanse my motives. Take out every desire that's really about me, and give me the courage to write down what's really from You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Write It Down

A Kingdom vision is something God shows you, not something you invent, and Scripture's instruction for receiving one is surprisingly practical: write it down and wait for it.

The prophet Habakkuk didn't start with a vision. He started with a complaint. "How long, Lord, must I cry for help? But you do not listen! I call out to you, 'Violence!' But you do not intervene!" (Habakkuk 1:2). God's first answer was more than Habakkuk could take in: "For I will do something in your lifetime that you will not believe even though you are forewarned" (1:5). So Habakkuk took up a position and waited. "I will stand at my watch post," he said; "I will keep watching, so I can see what he says to me" (2:1). Then the Lord answered him:

> *“The Lord responded: ‘Write down this message (חָזוֹן)! Record it legibly on tablets, so the one who announces it may read it easily. For the message is a witness to what is decreed; it gives reliable testimony about how matters will turn out. Even if the message is not fulfilled right away, wait patiently; for it will certainly come to pass – it will not arrive late.’”*
>
> **HABAKKUK 2:2–3**

WORD STUDY

חָזוֹן *ḥāzôn* H2377

> **“message”** · Habakkuk 2:2

Range. A vision; a revelation; an oracle or prophecy. It comes from the verb *ḥāzâ* (H2372), “to see” or “to behold,” so at its root it is *something seen*. Brown-Driver-Briggs gives four senses: a vision seen in an ecstatic state, a vision in the night, a divine communication given in a vision (an oracle or prophecy), and the title of a prophetic book (as in Isaiah 1:1). It occurs thirty-five times in the Hebrew Bible.

The sense here. A revelation from God that Habakkuk is to record. The NET translates it “message,” because the point is its content; most English versions have “vision.” The word appears again in verse 3: *the vision* will come to pass at its appointed time.

Why it carries the argument. A *ḥāzôn* is received, not manufactured. That corrects a common misuse of Proverbs 29:18, which the King James renders, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” That verse is often quoted in support of organizational vision statements, but the word is *ḥāzôn*, and the NET translates it accurately: “When there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint.” Proverbs isn’t talking about goal-setting. It’s talking about what happens when God’s people stop hearing from Him. Your vision for the Kingdom isn’t Scripture, and it doesn’t carry Habakkuk’s authority. But it should come from the same

place: from God, seen and not invented, and tested by His word.

Source. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

Notice three things about how God handled Habakkuk's vision.

It was bigger than Habakkuk. God said He would do something Habakkuk "will not believe even though you are forewarned" (1:5). Later in the same chapter He shows the scale of it: "For recognition of the Lord's sovereign majesty will fill the earth just as the waters fill up the sea" (2:14). Nothing about that was achievable by one prophet with a stylus.

It was written down. "Record it legibly on tablets." Writing a vision does two things. It makes it clear enough for someone else to read and act on ("so the one who announces it may read it easily"), and it holds you to what you heard. An unwritten dream drifts. A written one can be checked, prayed over and tested.

It had its own timing. "Even if the message is not fulfilled right away, wait patiently." God didn't promise Habakkuk speed. He promised certainty: "it will not arrive late." Late by whose calendar? Not Habakkuk's. A vision from God keeps God's schedule.

That's why Step 11 asks you to write your vision down, and why this course won't ask you to make it happen by next quarter.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Is there something you've complained to God about for years, something broken in the world that you keep asking Him to fix? Could your complaint be the doorway to your vision, as Habakkuk's was?

A Desire He Puts There

A God-given vision usually starts as a desire, and Scripture treats that desire as something God can place in you, not something to be suspicious of by default.

> *"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing (תַּאֲוָה) fulfilled is like a tree of life."*
>
> **PROVERBS 13:12**

WORD STUDY

תַּאֲוָה *ta'ăwâ* H8378

> **"longing"** · Proverbs 13:12

Range. A longing, wish or desire; an appetite or craving; the thing desired. It comes from the verb *ʾāwâ* (H183), "to desire" or "to long for." Brown-Driver-Briggs notes that it's used in both good and bad senses. It occurs twenty-one times in the Hebrew Bible.

The sense here. A deep, sustained desire, strong enough that leaving it unfulfilled makes the heart sick. The same word appears seven verses later: "A desire fulfilled is sweet to the soul" (13:19). And in Psalm 10:17 it describes the longing of the oppressed that God Himself hears.

Why it carries the argument. The word is morally neutral. Israel's craving for meat in the wilderness was *taʾăwâ* too, and it ended in judgment (Numbers 11:4, 33–34). So Scripture doesn't tell you to trust every desire. It tells you that deep longings matter, that their fulfillment is "like a tree of life," and that God cares which ones you carry. The work of Step 11 is to sort your longings: to bring them into the light, let God cleanse them, and write down the ones that are His.

Source. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

"Tree of life" is not a casual phrase. The last time we saw that tree was in Eden (Genesis 2:9; 3:22). Proverbs uses it to say that a longing fulfilled restores something of what life was meant to be. That fits what this whole course has been saying: God's purpose for you is part of His purpose for restoring His world.

Two passages show where holy desire comes from. Paul tells the Philippians that "the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort – for the sake of his good pleasure – is God" (Philippians 2:13). The *desire* is God's work, not only the effort. And when Peter explained what happened at Pentecost, he quoted Joel: "your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams" (Acts 2:17). Visions and dreams aren't reserved for prophets anymore. God gives them to His people, young and old.

You met a third passage in Session 1. Psalm 20 is a blessing prayed over someone going out to battle: "May he grant your heart's desire; may he bring all your plans to pass!" (Psalm 20:4). The word translated "plans" there is *ʿēṣâ*, the same word for counsel and purpose you studied in Session 1 (Proverbs 20:5). God grants plans that line up with His counsel, and the psalm assumes He's pleased to.

So how do you tell a God-given vision from a self-made one? Here are three marks.

It works *through* you, not *for* you. A Kingdom vision is a picture of what God wants to accomplish through your life for others. If the dream ends with you comfortable, admired or secure, it may be a good goal, but it isn't yet a Kingdom vision.

It needs God. If you can accomplish it with a bit of hard work, you don't need God, and it isn't a vision; it's a goal. Goals are good. But a vision from God should frighten you a little, because you can't imagine doing it in your own strength or with your current abilities. Taylor's twenty-four workers cost him months of agony before he dared to ask. That's the kind of size we're talking about.

It fits the heart God gave you. A vision that comes out of nowhere, with no connection to your passions, pursuits, ministries or arena, deserves a second look. God sometimes surprises His people, but more often the vision He gives is the natural next step of the heart He's been forming. Your Steps 7 through 10 are the soil a real vision grows in.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> In an actual group that worked through these steps, this is where people first began to stall. Every one of them had finished the first ten steps. At this one, several asked for more time, and many of the visions that did come in came in small. One woman wrote that she had thoughts "bouncing around in my head" but wasn't comfortable putting them into words yet. One man listed the goals he'd set when he first came to Christ, every one of them good, and none of them needing a vision. A third described a Bible study for women who had walked through what she had walked through, and the coach pushed back gently: "Based on what you wrote, an independent observer would never be able to tell whether you accomplished your dream."
>
> The coach's most useful move was to enlarge. A young man who leads the teen group at a small church wrote movingly about kids caught in a broken foster system, then admitted he didn't know what his dream was. The coach wrote back: "Can you imagine God getting you the resources to create a brand new fostering model for those kids? Can you imagine God using you to

launch a ‘rescue mission’ type of scenario where those kids can get out of abusive situations and into a facility where role models can show them a way forward?” Another man asked the Holy Spirit and heard a number. He wanted to pour resources into people who feel unloved by the world, he wrote, and “the amount of 5 million kept popping in my head.”

The visions from that group that had edges on them looked like this: tools that help churches around the world organize and communicate; a faith-based homeless shelter in one man’s hometown; a piece of land about the size of a football field, farmed to feed a rescue mission and then other shelters. You could tell, years later, whether any of those had happened.

So add one more test to the three marks, the coach’s test: *Could someone else tell whether it happened?* If not, it’s still a wish. Keep praying until it has edges.

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That every big dream is from God, or that bigger is holier.
- That you should announce your vision publicly, quit your job or spend money you don’t have because you wrote a dream down.
- That goals are unspiritual. Most faithful work is done through ordinary goals.

WHAT I AM SAYING

- That God places real desires in His people, and those desires deserve to be written down and tested, not ignored.
- That a Kingdom vision is bigger than you on purpose, so that it requires God.
- That writing it down is the first act of faith, and waiting for it is the second.

ILLUSTRATION

King David had a vision he never saw fulfilled. Settled in his cedar palace, he said to Nathan the prophet, “Look! I am living in a palace made from cedar, while the ark of God sits in the middle of a tent” (2 Samuel 7:2). He wanted to build God a temple. God said no: “When the time comes for you to die, I will raise up your descendant, one of your own sons, to succeed you… He will build a house for my name” (7:12–13).

> But notice how God treated the desire itself. Years later Solomon recalled it at the temple's dedication: "The Lord told my father David, 'It is right for you to have a strong desire to build a temple to honor me. But you will not build the temple; your very own son will build the temple'" (1 Kings 8:18–19). God called the desire *right*. He simply assigned the building to someone else.
>
> So David did what he could. "I will make preparations for its construction," he said, and "David made extensive preparations before he died" (1 Chronicles 22:5). He gathered gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and precious stones, and then gave his own treasure: "to show my commitment to the temple of my God, I donate my personal treasure of gold and silver" (29:3). The temple Solomon built was David's vision, funded and prepared by David.
>
> Paul summed up David's life in a sentence you studied in Session 1: "David, after he had served God's purpose in his own generation, died" (Acts 13:36). Part of serving God's *boulē* in his generation was preparing for something the next generation would finish.

David's story gives you permission to write down a vision you may never see completed. Some of the most important Kingdom work is laying a foundation someone else will build on. If your vision is bigger than your lifetime, that isn't evidence that it's not from God. It may be evidence that it is.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Is there a desire you've set aside because you assumed you'd never see it fulfilled? What if your part is to prepare for it, as David did?

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn't dreaming big just ambition in Christian clothing?

Some readers will feel uneasy about everything above, and the objection deserves to be heard at full strength. *Jesus said the last will be first. Paul warned against being "motivated by selfish ambition or vanity" (Philippians 2:3). Christian history is full of leaders who called their own empire-building a "vision from God." God told Baruch plainly, "Are you looking for great things for yourself? Do not look for such things" (Jeremiah 45:5). Asking people to dream big about*

their own lives, and to write down plans that "embarrass" them, sounds a lot like the world's self-help gospel with Bible verses added. Wouldn't humble faithfulness in small things be safer?

A good deal of that is true, and it's better to say so plainly. Selfish ambition is real, it's condemned in Scripture, and it hides easily behind spiritual language. Every one of us is capable of calling our own desire for importance "God's vision." And Jeremiah 45:5 is a warning to take seriously: Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, was worn out and discouraged, and part of his trouble was that he had wanted more for himself than God was giving.

But look at what Jesus did with ambition when He met it face to face. The mother of James and John asked Him to seat her sons at His right and left hand in His Kingdom (Matthew 20:20–21). That was naked ambition, and the other disciples were furious. Jesus didn't tell them to stop wanting greatness. He redirected it: "Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (20:26–28). The desire to be great wasn't the problem. The definition of greatness was.

Here's where I land, and why. I believe the answer to selfish ambition isn't smaller dreams; it's a different object. Baruch was told not to seek great things *for himself*. Taylor sought great things *for China*, and David for the house of God. The test isn't size. It's direction: who is the dream for, and who gets the glory? J. Robert Clinton, who spent decades studying how God develops leaders, put the balance well:

> *"Each is unique. Another's success is not our standard. Bigger is not better, nor is a greater sphere of influence."*
>
> J. Robert Clinton · Professor of leadership, Fuller Theological Seminary · *The Making of a Leader*, 1988

A Kingdom vision isn't measured against anyone else's. For one believer it will be a global ministry. For another it will be a family that walks with God for four generations, or one neighborhood that knows it's loved. What makes it a vision is not its size but its source, and the fact that it requires God.

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That ambition is always good, or that a desire is holy because it's big.

- That small, hidden faithfulness is second-class. Most of the Kingdom is built that way.

WHAT I AM SAYING

- That the cure for selfish ambition is a different object, not a smaller heart.
- That Jesus redefined greatness as service; He didn't forbid wanting it.
- That a Kingdom vision is judged by its source and its direction, not its size.

Where this stays unresolved. No one's motives are pure, and Scripture doesn't give a test that separates holy desire from selfish ambition with perfect precision. "The human mind is more deceitful than anything else," Jeremiah warns (Jeremiah 17:9), and that includes the mind that's writing down its vision. The best safeguards are the ones Session 2 taught: ask to be searched, test what you hear with Scripture and with mature witnesses, and give it time. You'll probably find mixed motives in your vision. Write it down anyway, and keep asking God to purify it.

Naming Your Affinity

Step 12 asks you to gather everything you've written in the Affinity section into one statement of how God has shaped your heart. It's the second of the course's three summary statements, and it works the same way your Design statement did in Session 4.

In Session 5 you met Frederick Buechner's description of calling: "the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Your passions (Step 7) are the world's hunger that moves you. Your pursuits (Step 8) are your deep gladness. Your ministries and your mountain (Steps 9 and 10) show where that hunger and gladness have already met, and where they're heading. Your vision (Step 11) shows what you'd attempt if nothing stood in the way. Your Affinity statement names the place where all five point.

In the picture you've been drawing since Session 1, your design supplied the colors, and your heart supplied their intensity. Your Affinity statement names where the color in your picture runs deepest.

Your Design statement described *what* you're built to do, in terms that would be true anywhere. Your Affinity statement names *for whom* and *where*: the people you're drawn to serve, the needs you can't ignore and the arena you're sent into. Keep the two separate for now. Session 12 will bring them together with your Shaping.

One warning belongs here, and it may be the most practical sentence in this session: **comparison will kill your purpose.** The moment you start measuring your affinity against someone else's, you'll either inflate yours to match theirs or dismiss it because it looks smaller. Paul's instruction is simple: "Let each one examine his own work. Then he can take pride in himself and not compare himself with someone else. For each one will carry his own load" (Galatians 6:4–5). Your load is yours. So is your heart.

Expect this step to be hard. In an actual group that worked through these steps, it was where the most people slowed down: four of the nineteen who wrote a vision never wrote an Affinity statement. Summarizing your own heart is harder than summarizing test results, and it's easy to drift into a different question. Some people described what they're *like* rather than whom they're *for*: "communicator, caregiver, teacher," or "a courageous truth teller with a compassionate heart." Those are design words. Some wrote a heartfelt testimony of God's faithfulness instead of a summary of Steps 7–11. The statements that worked named people and needs. "God has shaped my heart to protect and restore the vulnerable," one woman wrote, "especially those harmed mentally, emotionally, or financially, and to help rebuild what has been taken from them." Another wrote, without being asked to use the form, "I'm called to help people strip through the lies of false identity, to discover who God says they are." If you stall here, draft badly first. A rough statement you can fix is worth more than a perfect one you never write.

"Anyone who has discovered who God made them to be will never want to be someone else."

Bill Johnson · Senior leader, Bethel Church, Redding, California · *Born for Significance*, 2020

CONSIDER THIS

If you've kept your Purpose Journal electronically, an AI tool (Claude, ChatGPT or similar) can help you see the pattern across the Affinity section. Write your own first draft before you use it. Then copy your answers to Steps 7–11 and paste them in after this prompt:

"I'm working through a discipleship course on discovering my God-given purpose. Below are my answers to five steps about how God has shaped my heart: my ranked passions (what breaks my heart), my pursuits (what fills me back up), the ministries I've been part of, the sphere of society I'm drawn to, and my big vision for the Kingdom. Please (1) point out people, needs, places and themes that repeat across

the five answers; (2) note anything that seems to pull in a different direction; and (3) offer three different drafts of an Affinity statement of 50 words or less, each beginning 'I'm called to…'. Name who I'm drawn to serve, what need I'm drawn to meet, and where. Don't describe my abilities; I've done that separately. Don't flatter me. If the evidence for something is thin, say so."

As in Session 4, treat what comes back as a mirror, not a witness. It can only organize what you gave it. Take one draft, or none, and rewrite it until it sounds like you. In that same group, one man's Affinity statement still began with his own first name, in the third person, because it came straight from the AI. Nobody writes about their own heart that way. If a sentence says "you," "your" or your name, it isn't yours yet.

PAUSE & REFLECT

When you read back through Steps 7–10, whose faces come to mind? Which people keep showing up?

The Turn

Everything above has been explanation. A Kingdom vision is something God shows you, not something you manufacture; Habakkuk was told to write it down, and to wait for it on God's schedule. God places real longings in His people, and a longing fulfilled is "like a tree of life." You can tell a Kingdom vision by three marks: it works through you, it needs God, and it fits the heart He gave you. And Jesus didn't forbid the desire for greatness; He redirected it toward service.

Now you write it down. First the dream, then the heart behind it.

The Experience · The Dreams You Set Down

Before you start Step 11, go looking for old dreams. Many people have forgotten dreams, or set them down years ago because they seemed impossible, or because someone laughed at them.

Take a sheet of paper, or a page in your journal, and write down every Kingdom dream you can remember having, at any age: as a child, as a new believer, in college, in your first job, after a retreat or a mission trip. Don't evaluate them yet. Just list them, with roughly when each one came and what happened to it.

Then read the list slowly and ask the Holy Spirit two questions. *Which of these was from You?* And *which of these did I set down that You never asked me to set down?* Circle anything that still stirs something in you.

DISCOVERY STEPS · STEPS 11 AND 12

Use the Listening Rhythm for each step: *ask to be searched; do the work; sit with it; test it with the witnesses; sleep on it.*

STEP 11 · MY VISION

The prompt. *If you had unlimited time and resources, what do you dream of accomplishing for the Kingdom?*

What to do. Start with The Experience and the dreams you circled. Then pray, and ask God to show you what He wants to accomplish *through* you. Reread your passions (Step 7) and your mountain (Step 10); a real vision usually grows out of them. Write what you see as a picture of the finished thing, in the present tense, as if it has already happened: *"Families in our county…"* rather than *"I hope to…"*. Leave out the hedges. As one coach put it: no "If I could…", no "I would try…", no "It would be nice to…". For each part of the vision, add one line answering, *Why does this need God?* If any part could be done with hard work alone, either enlarge it or move it to a separate list of goals. If you pray and hear nothing, read the *What About* in Session 2, write "not yet" in your journal, and keep going. People who stall here often find their vision later in the course.

What to produce. One to three vision statements, each one or two sentences long, written as a picture of the

finished thing. Under each, one line on why it needs God. Date the page, so you'll know years from now when you wrote it.

Surface answer: *"I love seeing people get saved, get healed and get delivered. So, I guess I really just want people to see Jesus and accept Him as their Lord and Savior."* (A real answer, and a beautiful desire. But it's the desire of every believer, and nobody could ever tell whether it had been fulfilled. A vision names which people, where, and what would be different.)

Deep answer: *"Every child in our county's foster system has a church family standing behind their foster home: meals, respite care, tutoring, and at least one adult who prays for them by name. This needs God, because I have no idea how to mobilize that many churches, and I'm not sure I'm the kind of person people follow."*

Worked examples.

- *Dave (the author):* "I want to write the most effective discipleship content ever created."
- *Participant A:* "My wife and I have a thriving marriage and family, and an impactful family ministry focused on family discipleship and caring for the needs of children. My firm manages $300 million and gives away more than $1 million a year. I have a global financial ministry through teaching, books and online courses."
- *Other participants:* "I want to build tools and platforms that enable churches around the world to organize and communicate more effectively, and that empower them to greater impact on the lost and broken in their communities." · "I'd like to build a faith-based homeless shelter in my hometown to help the homeless and spread the gospel." · "I won an auction for property… About a football field. I believe I have the opportunity to learn to farm to

supply food and resources for [a rescue mission] and eventually other shelters."

– *Another participant*, before and after: her first draft was a paragraph of hopes every believer shares. Then she added, almost as an afterthought, a house for people coming out of incarceration, most with a history of addiction, and a curriculum she wanted to rewrite around God's truth. Her coach's reply: "I think your addition is really your dream… Don't downplay that."

You're done when …

- [ ] You've done The Experience, and gone back to at least one old dream to ask whether God is reviving it.
- [ ] Your vision is written as a picture of the finished thing, not a list of activities.
- [ ] It's for the Kingdom, and it works *through* you for others, not *for* you.
- [ ] Every part of it has a line explaining why it needs God.
- [ ] It connects to at least two of your earlier Affinity steps (7–10).
- [ ] Someone who read it could tell, years from now, whether it happened.
- [ ] It embarrasses you a little to read it aloud. Read it to your witness anyway.

Time: at least two days. Give the dreams time to surface; the ones you've buried longest usually take longest to come back.

STEP 12 · MY AFFINITY

The prompt. *Summarize your responses to Steps 7–11 into a cohesive statement of your Affinity. How has God shaped your heart?*

What to do. Reread Steps 7–11 in one sitting. Underline every person, need, place or group that appears in more than one step. Ask yourself Buechner's question: *Where do my deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet?* Draft three versions of a statement beginning *"I'm called to…"*. If you like, use the AI prompt in *Consider This* above to see patterns you missed, then rewrite in your own words. Name who you're drawn to serve, what need, and where. Leave out your abilities; your Design statement already covers them. Read your best draft to your witness and ask, *"Is this where your heart is too, or is it mine?"*

What to produce. One statement, 50 words or less, beginning *"I'm called to…"*.

Surface answer: *"He has shaped me to be a courageous truth teller with a compassionate heart!"* (A real answer, and a true one. But it describes what she's like, which belongs in her Design statement, not whom her heart is set on. Her other Affinity steps already named them: people living in bondage to lies about who they are and who God is. The statement just didn't say so.)

Deep answer: *"I'm called to walk with young adults who are drifting from faith, especially first-generation college students, helping them find their footing in Scripture and in community, on campus and in the workplaces where they'll spend their lives."*

Worked examples.

- *Participant A:* "I'm called to teach and disciple God's people in faithful stewardship and Kingdom life."
- *Other participants:* "God has shaped my heart to protect and restore the vulnerable, especially those harmed mentally, emotionally, or financially, and to help rebuild what has been taken from them." · "I'm called to help people strip through the lies of false

identity, to discover who God says they are.” · “God has shaped my heart to seek justice for the innocent and care for those who feel abandoned by the world.” · “My affinity for people is about being faithful and available — to accompany others and show mercy rather than answers.”

– The deep answer above is an illustration written for this course, not a participant’s statement.

You’re done when …

- [ ] Your statement is 50 words or fewer and begins “I’m called to…”.
- [ ] You can trace it back to at least three of Steps 7–11.
- [ ] It names who, what need and where, and it doesn’t restate your Design statement.
- [ ] If you used an AI tool, no sentence still says “you,” “your” or your own name.
- [ ] You haven’t compared it with anyone else’s, or if you did, you’ve repented of it and rewritten it as yours.
- [ ] Your witness read it and said, in effect, “That’s your heart.”
- [ ] You slept on it, reread it, and it still rings true.

Time: at least two days. This is the second of the course’s three summary statements.

BIG IDEAS

1. A Kingdom vision is a *ḥāzôn*, something God shows you, not something you invent (Habakkuk 2:2).
2. Write it down, and wait for it on God’s schedule: “it will certainly come to pass – it will not arrive late” (Habakkuk 2:3).
3. God places real longings in His people, and “a longing fulfilled is like a tree of life” (Proverbs 13:12).
4. A Kingdom vision works through you for others, needs God, and fits the heart He gave you. It may be bigger than your lifetime, as

David's was.

5. The cure for selfish ambition is a different object, not a smaller heart. Comparison will kill your purpose; your load is yours (Galatians 6:4–5).

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God puts dreams in His people that only He can fulfill, so that when they're fulfilled, He gets the glory.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for the desires You've put in my heart. I give You the ones that were really about me, and I ask You to purify the rest. Give me the courage to write down what You've shown me, even when it embarrasses me, and the patience to wait for it on Your schedule. Keep me from comparing my heart with anyone else's. Do far beyond anything I could ask or think, so that the glory is Yours. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

J. Hudson Taylor, *A Retrospect* (first published 1894).
Taylor's own short account of his call to China and the founding of the China Inland Mission, including the Brighton

beach story. Free online in several editions.

SUBSTANTIAL

Dave Harvey, *Rescuing Ambition* (2010).
A pastor's case that ambition is neither to be killed nor indulged, but redeemed: aimed at God's glory rather than our own. A thoughtful companion to this session's What About.

ACADEMIC

O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (1990).
A careful commentary on the Hebrew text, including Habakkuk 2:1–4 and the "appointed time" of the vision.

LEADING THIS SESSION

This session asks people to say out loud things they've rarely said to anyone, so the group's first job is to make that safe. Don't let anyone laugh at a vision, and don't let anyone compete. The *What About* will draw out the people who are uncomfortable with big dreams. Honor that discomfort, because it often comes from having watched someone's "vision from God" hurt a church, and then point to Jesus' answer in Matthew 20: He redirected ambition rather than forbidding it. The most productive exercise is The Experience; ask for volunteers to share one dream they set down years ago and what happened to it. Group questions: *What's one dream you set down that you sense God asking you to pick back up?* and *Where does your heart run deepest?* Keep a close eye on attendance. In an actual group that worked through these steps, Steps 11 and 12 were the first places people stopped, so check in personally with anyone who goes quiet this week. The coach's most useful move at Step 11 was to *enlarge*: take what someone wrote, ask "Can you imagine God…?", and paint the bigger version back to them. At Step 12, the most common miss is a statement about what someone is like instead of whom their heart is for. Ask, *Whose faces come to mind when you read it?* If none do, it isn't finished.

> If you have questions or comments about this content, or about your personal situation, email us at feedback@thedisciplespath.com.

Next: Session 8, *Your Story*, opens the Shaping section. It turns from the heart God gave you to the life you've

already lived: the milestones that turned you, and the people who shaped you.

SESSION 7 · KINGDOM PURPOSE

Your Vision

If you knew God was in it, what would you dare to attempt for His Kingdom?



A vision is seen, not invented. Write it down, and wait for it on God's schedule.

Habakkuk 2:2–3
Proverbs 29:18

God places real longings in His people. A Kingdom vision works through you, needs God and fits your heart.

Proverbs 13:12
1 Kings 8:18–19

Where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet. Don't compare.

Galatians 6:4–5
Matthew 20:26–28

SO · NOW

SO

God puts dreams in His people that only He can fulfill, so that when they're fulfilled, He gets the glory.

NOW

List the dreams you set down, then complete Step 11 (your vision) and Step 12 (your Affinity statement).

Discovery Steps · Steps 11 and 12

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God puts dreams in His people that only He can fulfill, so that when they're fulfilled, He gets the glory.

© thedisciplespath.com



YOUR STORY

Kingdom Purpose: Shaping

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Stones by the Jordan

03 The Darkest Valley

04 The People Who Shaped You

05 Dots Already Connected

06 The Turn

07 The Experience · Draw Your Timeline

The Question

On the worst night of his life, Simon Peter stood beside a charcoal fire. Jesus had been arrested and taken to the high priest's house, and Peter followed as far as the courtyard. "Now the slaves and the guards were standing around a charcoal fire they had made, warming themselves because it was cold. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself" (John 18:18). Three times that night someone asked whether he was one of Jesus' disciples, and three times he said no. "Then Peter denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed" (18:27).

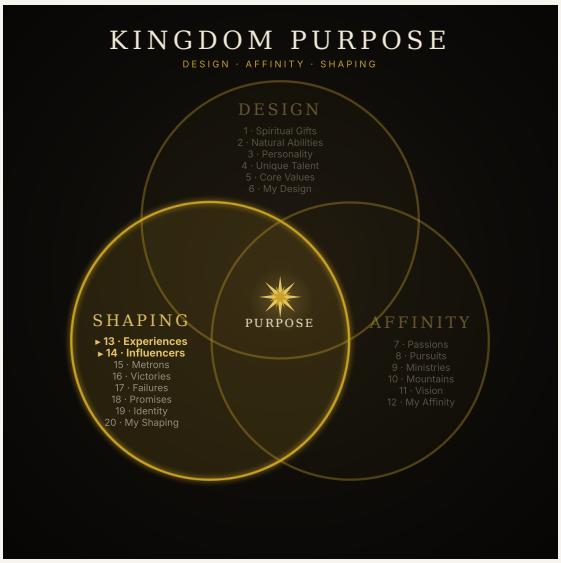
A few weeks later, after the resurrection, Peter and several other disciples had fished all night on the Sea of Galilee and caught nothing. A man on the shore told them where to cast the net, and when they came ashore, "they saw a charcoal fire ready with a fish placed on it, and bread" (John 21:9). The Greek word John uses, *anthrakia*, appears only twice in the New Testament: in the courtyard where Peter denied Jesus, and on the beach where Jesus restored him. Anyone who has smelled a charcoal fire knows how quickly the smell brings a memory back. Jesus didn't erase Peter's worst memory. He met him beside it.

Then Jesus asked him three times, "Do you love me?", once for each denial, and gave him the same assignment three times over: "Feed my lambs… Shepherd my sheep… Feed my sheep" (21:15–17). Decades later, when Peter wrote to the elders of the churches, his charge to them was the one Jesus had given him that morning: "Give a shepherd's care to God's flock among you" (1 Peter 5:2). The worst night of his life and the best morning of his life had become part of the same story, and his calling grew out of both.

Your life has fires like that, and people who met you beside them. This session opens the Shaping section of the course. It asks you to look back at the story you've already lived.

So the question is:

What has God been doing in the story you've already lived?



You are here: Shaping · Steps 13–14.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You were there for every part of my story, including the parts I'd rather forget. Walk back through it with me. Show me the turning points, and what You were doing in them. Show me the people You sent, and what they left in me. Where memories are painful, be close, and let me see them with You instead of alone. In Jesus' name, amen.

Stones by the Jordan

God tells His people to remember what He has done, and He gives them ways to mark it. The milestones in your life are worth remembering on purpose, because they're where God's shaping is easiest to see.

When Israel crossed the Jordan River into the land God had promised them, the water stopped flowing and the people walked across on dry ground. Before they moved on, God had Joshua choose twelve men, one from each tribe, to carry a stone out of the middle of the riverbed:

> *“The stones will be a reminder to you. When your children ask someday, ‘Why are these stones important to you?’ tell them how the water of the Jordan stopped flowing before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the water of the Jordan stopped flowing. These stones will be a lasting memorial for the Israelites.”*
>
> **JOSHUA 4:6–7**

The stones had one job: to make people ask a question, so that the story would be told again. A generation later, Samuel did the same thing after God delivered Israel from the Philistines: “Samuel took a stone and placed it between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, ‘Up to here the Lord has helped us’” (1 Samuel 7:12). *Ebenezer* means “stone of help.” It marked a turning point, and it looked back over the whole road that led there.

Moses told Israel to do the same thing with their wilderness years: “Remember the whole way by which he has brought you these forty years through the desert so that he might, by humbling you, test you to see if you have it within you to keep his commandments or not” (Deuteronomy 8:2). *The whole way*, not only the victories. The forty years had included rebellion, judgment and grief. God wanted all of it remembered, because He had been at work in all of it.

That’s what Step 13 asks you to do. It isn’t asking for a résumé. It asks for your memorial stones: the experiences that turned your direction, changed what you believed or reshaped your walk with God.

J. Robert Clinton, who spent decades studying how God develops leaders, found that God’s shaping tends to cluster around what he called *boundary events*, the turning points between one season of life and the next. They include crises, promotions, a new ministry, learning a major new concept, unusual experiences, life-changing encounters with a person, a divine guidance experience and a geographic move. Clinton also found that the leaders who grew the most learned to look at their own history a particular way:

> *“A sovereign mindset is a way of viewing life’s activities so as to see and respond to God’s purposes in them. It often takes a paradigm shift to move from ‘Why me?’ kinds of questions to ‘What are you shaping in me through this?’ kinds of questions.”*
>
> J. Robert Clinton · Professor of leadership, Fuller Theological Seminary · *The Making of a Leader*, 1988

What were You shaping in me through this? That's the question to ask of every stone you set up in Step 13.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> One woman in an actual group that worked through these steps did exactly that, almost without meaning to. She wrote down five memories. The first was running wild in the countryside of her mother's homeland as a child: "Days spent looking for fairies, trying to catch rabbits and coming home with nettle stings." The second was the births of her children. The third was Saturday nights in her mother's kitchen, crowded with family, "Stories and debates and laughter you could hear from the street." Then the early years with the man she married, and finally her baptism in the sea, "going under that cold green water and coming up feeling like my life was brand new."
>
> Then she read back over the list and wrote one more sentence: "I see that a lot of this has feeling a part of something - a family, a culture, part of someone, a covenant. It's all when I felt that I somehow belonged." Five stones, and one thread running through all of them. That's what Step 13 is looking for.

PAUSE & REFLECT

If you had to choose one memorial stone from your life, one experience you'd want your children or grandchildren to ask about, what would it be?

The Darkest Valley

The experiences that shape us most deeply are usually not the pleasant ones. Some milestones are mountaintops: a wedding, a birth, a conversion, a call. But most people, asked to name the events that changed them most, name a valley.

The best-known psalm in the Bible makes its turn in the valley:

> *"Even when I must walk through the darkest valley (צַלְמָוֶת), I fear no danger, for you are with me; your rod and your staff reassure me."*

PSALM 23:4

WORD STUDY

צַלְמָוֶת *ṣalmāwet* H6757

> **“darkest valley”** · Psalm 23:4

Range. Deep shadow; deep darkness; “death-shadow.” Strong’s derives it from *ṣēl* (“shadow”) and *māwet* (“death”), which is where the King James “valley of the shadow of death” comes from. Brown-Driver-Briggs notes that many scholars instead read it *ṣalmût*, “darkness,” from a root found in related languages. It occurs eighteen times in the Hebrew Bible, most often in poetry, often alongside words for darkness and night.

The sense here. The deepest darkness a person can walk through, including, but not limited to, the threat of death. The NET’s “darkest valley” follows the “deep darkness” reading; the KJV’s “shadow of death” follows the older derivation. Either way, it’s the worst place on the road.

Why it carries the argument. Read Psalm 23 slowly and notice the pronouns. In verses 1–3 David speaks *about* the Lord: “*He* takes me to lush pastures… *He* restores my strength.” In verse 4, in the darkest valley, he starts speaking *to* Him: “for *you* are with me.” The psalm stays in the second person from there on: “*You* prepare a feast before me” (23:5). In the valley, *He* became *You*. That’s why the valleys in your story matter so much for this step. They’re often where God stopped being someone you knew about and became someone you knew.

Source. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Strong’s Concordance via Bible Hub.

Peter’s story shows the same pattern. The denial was his darkest valley, and it was where he learned what Jesus’ love was actually like: not a reward for his loyalty, but a gift given after his failure. Jesus’ last words in that conversation were a prophecy about how Peter would die: “when you are old, you will stretch out your

hands, and others will tie you up and bring you where you do not want to go." John explains, "Now Jesus said this to indicate clearly by what kind of death Peter was going to glorify God." And then Jesus told him, "Follow me" (John 21:18–19). The man who had denied Jesus beside one charcoal fire would die for Him, and he would spend the years in between shepherding the flock.

You'll probably find the same thing in your own list. In an actual group that worked through these steps, ten of the fourteen people who answered Step 13 named at least one valley among their most memorable experiences, and for several it was the experience that mattered most. One man's first milestone wasn't an event at all but a discovery: "Learning that God isn't the author of my pain and struggles - This completely upended my understanding and then my perspective of God." One woman wrote that the worst loss of her life had led her back to church and back to Christ, and had left her wanting to help others through the same valley: "I look back and see how Christ sustained me and comforted me." For her, too, *He* had become *You*.

Notice what happened next. Peter turned around, saw John, and asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus answered, "If I want him to live until I come back, what concern is that of yours? You follow me!" (21:21–22). Session 7 warned you about comparing your heart with anyone else's. Jesus says the same about your story. It's yours. So is His call on it.

CAUTION

This step asks you to revisit your history, and for some people that history includes abuse, violence, betrayal, addiction or loss that still hurts. Please don't work through trauma alone in a journal. If a memory surfaces that overwhelms you, stop, and talk with someone you trust: a pastor, a mature friend or a counselor. Kingdom Essentials Sessions 18 through 21 walk through forgiveness and freedom in Christ, and they're a good place to start. You don't have to write down every detail to complete Step 13. You can simply name a hard season, note that God was there, and come back to it later. This course can wait while you get the help you need.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where in your story did God stop being *He* and become *You*?

The People Who Shaped You

God shapes you through people. Some of the most important turning points in your story probably have a face attached to them.

Timothy's story shows how many hands can be involved. He grew up in Lystra, "the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but whose father was a Greek" (Acts 16:1). Paul later reminded him where his faith began: "I recall your sincere faith that was alive first in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and I am sure is in you" (2 Timothy 1:5). Before Paul ever met him, "the brothers in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him" (Acts 16:2). Then Paul took him along, and Timothy watched him up close for years: "You, however, have followed my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, my faith, my patience, my love, my endurance, as well as the persecutions and sufferings that happened to me" (2 Timothy 3:10–11). A grandmother, a mother, a church and a mentor all shaped one young man.

Lois still turns up in people's stories. In an actual group that worked through these steps, five of the fourteen who answered Step 14 named a grandparent among the people who shaped them most: a grandmother who "loved me unconditionally" and was "my only steady/stable & encouraging influence" from birth until her late teens; another whose "faith, her strength, and her heart towards her family" one woman still carries; a grandfather whose "passion for learning and teaching" one woman still feels whenever she trains someone.

When Paul wrote to him, he opened with a word that sums up that relationship:

> *"to Timothy, my genuine (γνησίῳ) child in the faith. Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord!"*
>
> **1 TIMOTHY 1:2**

WORD STUDY

γνήσιος *gnēsios* G1103

> **“genuine”** · 1 Timothy 1:2

Range. Thayer defines it as “legitimately born, not spurious; genuine, true, sincere.” It’s related to the words for birth and becoming (*genesis*, *ginomai*). It occurs four times in the New Testament: of the “genuineness” of the Corinthians’ love (2 Corinthians 8:8), of a “true companion” (Philippians 4:3), and of Timothy and Titus as Paul’s genuine children in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4).

The sense here. A legitimate child: not an imitation, not an adopted name only, but the real thing. Paul wasn’t Timothy’s father; Timothy’s father was a Greek (Acts 16:1). But in the faith, Timothy was Paul’s true son. The related adverb, *gnēsiōs*, appears only once in the New Testament, and it’s about Timothy too: Paul has “no one here like him who will readily demonstrate his deep concern for you,” literally who will *genuinely* care for them (Philippians 2:20). And Paul adds, “like a son working with his father, he served with me in advancing the gospel” (2:22).

Why it carries the argument. The deepest kind of influence doesn’t just teach you things. It reproduces something. Timothy carried a family resemblance to Paul, his genuine concern for the churches, because Paul had carried it first. That’s what Step 14 is looking for: not a list of people you admire, but the people whose faith, character or way of life you now carry, for good or ill.

Source. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Strong’s Concordance via Bible Hub.

The man who led me to Christ decades ago gave me a piece of advice I’ve never forgotten: “Where you’ll be in five years depends on two things: the books you read, and the people you hang around with.” As I came to know Scripture, I realized that advice came straight out of it. “The one who associates with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm” (Proverbs 13:20). “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals’” (1 Corinthians 15:33). Psalm 1

opens with the same warning about the company we keep. And through the decades since, I've found it to be entirely true.

The same is true in the other direction. We're all products of the people who've influenced us. We imitate the people we admire, sometimes without realizing it, and we try hard to avoid becoming the people we don't. Scripture expects this and tells us to use it well: "Remember your leaders, who spoke God's message to you; reflect on the outcome of their lives and imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7). Paul could even say, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Clinton calls the most important of these people *divine contacts* and *mentors*. A divine contact is someone God brings into your life at a crucial moment to affirm you, give you insight, challenge you or open a door, sometimes for a single conversation. A mentor stays longer:

> *"Mentors are people who can readily see potential in a person. They can tolerate mistakes, brashness, abrasiveness, and so on, in order to see potential develop."*
>
> J. Robert Clinton · Professor of leadership, Fuller Theological Seminary · *The Making of a Leader*, 1988

The same group described mentors in almost exactly Clinton's terms. One man wrote of a friend who "never looked at me as any less than. He saw and drew out the best in me." Another described an older coworker who "helped me uncover a lot of my potential and overcome mental hurdles I didn't realize I had." And one woman remembered a divine contact from her first months as a believer, an older woman in her church who discipled her and spoke prophetically about how God would use her: "At the time she was speaking those things all I kept thinking was NO WAY! She was right."

Your influencers may include people you've never met. Clinton noted that many great leaders were deeply shaped by books, especially biographies of people who had walked with God before them. In that group, not one person named an author. Don't leave yours off. An author whose book changed your life belongs on your Step 14 list.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Who saw potential in you before you saw it in yourself?

WHAT ABOUT …

What if the people who shaped me most are the ones who hurt me?

For many readers this is the hardest question in the course so far, and it deserves to be stated honestly. *When I list the people who influenced me most, the first names that come to mind aren't mentors. They're a father who left, a mother who couldn't stop criticizing, a pastor who abused his authority, a spouse who betrayed me. They shaped me more than anyone else, and not in a good way. Am I supposed to write them down as "influencers," as if they were gifts? And why would God have allowed them to shape me at all?*

Some of that has to be conceded plainly. The harm was real, and nothing in this course asks you to call it good. Joseph never called his brothers' betrayal good. What he said was, "As for you, you meant to harm me, but God intended it for a good purpose" (Genesis 50:20). Both halves of that sentence are true at once: the evil was theirs, and the purpose was God's. As Session 1 put it, God didn't erase the stray line; He worked it into the picture.

Here is where I land, and why. I believe the people who hurt you belong in your story, and that naming them honestly is part of seeing what God has been doing. Listing someone as an influence isn't the same as approving of them, excusing them or reconciling with them. It's telling the truth about what shaped you. Clinton found that God often uses what he called *negative preparation*, painful experiences that break a person loose from one season so they'll accept the next. And many people discover, when they look closely, that they became who they are partly *by contrast*: they became a faithful father because theirs wasn't, or learned to lead gently because they'd been led harshly. That's shaping too. In an actual group that worked through these steps, several people listed someone like this without being asked. One woman wrote that watching her parents' marriage, "in a strange way," had been "a 'cautionary tale' and helps me be committed to not repeat these behaviors." Another remembered her father telling her you sometimes have to step on a few fingers to climb the corporate ladder: "That only made my resolve to not ever want any position of power, even stronger."

> WHAT I AM NOT SAYING
>
> - That the harm done to you was good, or that God caused anyone to sin against you.

- That you have to contact, confront or reconcile with anyone in order to complete this step.
- That you should list the people who hurt you if doing so right now would reopen a wound you're not ready to face.

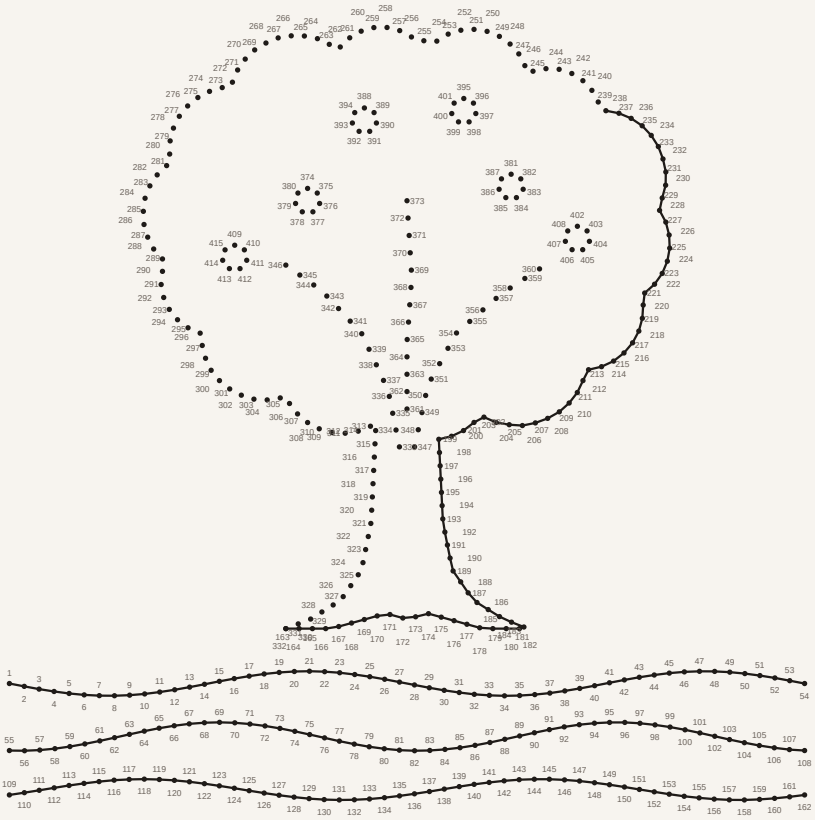
WHAT I AM SAYING

- That God can work even the worst lines in your story into His picture, without calling them good.
- That influence "by contrast" is real influence, and it's worth naming.
- That forgiveness is a path Jesus walks with you, at a pace you can bear. Kingdom Essentials Session 18 is a good place to start.

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture holds two things together without fully explaining how they fit: that human beings are truly responsible for the harm they do, and that God is sovereign over it and can bring good out of it (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28). Scripture never says *why* a particular person was allowed to hurt you, and this course won't pretend to. What it does promise is that the pain isn't wasted, and that God was with you in the valley even when you couldn't feel it.

Dots Already Connected

In Session 1 you saw the corner of a dot-to-dot picture drawn for this course, with forty-five of its dots connected. Here's the same picture now:



Dot 238 of 415. The same picture you saw in Session 1, now more than half connected. The corner you saw then turns out to be only the bottom edge. You may be starting to guess what the picture is. Hold that guess loosely; the Artist isn't finished.

Sessions 3 through 7 gave the picture its colors and their intensity: your design, and the heart God gave you. The Shaping section looks at the lines themselves: the path your life has actually taken, dot by dot.

You couldn’t see these lines while you were drawing them. When you were in the middle of a hard season, it may have felt like the pencil was wandering. But look back from here and some of the shape begins to appear. That’s exactly what this session asks you to do. The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard said it this way:

> *“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.”*

Søren Kierkegaard · Danish philosopher · *Journals*, 1843 (as usually condensed)

Some of the lines on your page are ones you’d rather erase. Session 10 will come back to those. For now, look for the lines you can see, and let the Artist show you what He was drawing.

The Turn

Everything above has been explanation. God tells His people to remember “the whole way” He has led them and to mark the turning points, as Israel did with the stones from the Jordan. The valleys often shape us most, because they’re where God so often stops being *He* and becomes *You*. God shapes us through people, and the deepest influence reproduces something genuine in us, as Paul’s did in Timothy. And even the people who hurt us belong in the story, not because the harm was good, but because God can work it into the picture.

Now you set up your stones and name your people.

The Experience · Draw Your Timeline

Before you start Step 13, draw your life.

Turn a sheet of paper sideways, or open a blank page in your journal, and draw a long horizontal line across the middle. Put your birth at the left end and today at the right. Mark the years along the bottom.

Now plot the experiences you remember most. Put the good ones above the line and the hard ones below it, higher or lower depending on how much they affected you. Don’t worry about getting everything; you can add more later. Then look for the *turning points*: the places where the direction of your life changed. Mark each one with a small vertical line, the way Clinton marked the boundaries between phases of a leader’s life. Many people find that their turning points gather around a few kinds of events: coming to faith, a move, a loss, a new relationship, a new assignment, a crisis.

When you’re done, look at the whole page and ask one question: *What were You doing here, Lord?*

DISCOVERY STEPS · STEPS 13 AND 14

Use the Listening Rhythm for each step: *ask to be searched; do the work; sit with it; test it with the witnesses; sleep on it.*

STEP 13 · MY EXPERIENCES

The prompt. *What life experiences are most memorable? Why and how?*

What to do. Start with The Experience and your timeline. List every experience that stands out, then choose the five to seven that shaped you most. For each one, write three short lines: *What happened*, *why it's memorable* and *how it shaped me* (what changed in your direction, your beliefs or your walk with God). Include at least one valley. Mark which of your experiences were turning points. For each turning point, ask Clinton's question: *What were You shaping in me through this?* If a memory is too painful to write about in detail, name it in a few words and move on (see the Caution above).

What to produce. Your timeline, plus five to seven milestones in order of their impact on you, each with its *what*, *why* and *how*. Mark the turning points.

Surface answer: *"Breaking bread with friends (Because friends are the true riches in this life!) Making a positive difference in someone else's life (Because it feels so darn good!)…"* (A real answer, and a warm one. It has a *why* for each memory, which is more than many first drafts have. But it has no *how*, nothing about what each experience changed, and no valley, though her later steps showed that her life held several.)

Deep answer: *"My father's death when I was nineteen. What happened: a heart attack, with no warning. Why it's memorable: it was the first time I realized I had no answers for the biggest questions. How it shaped me: it started a two-year search that ended with me in a campus Bible study, and it's why I still can't walk past someone who's grieving. Turning point: yes. This is where God became real to me."*

Worked examples.

- "The death of my father, resulting in a search for God."
- "The birth of my kids."

- *Participant A:* coming to faith in Jesus (with the month and year); a year of weekly discipleship meetings with a mentor; marrying his wife, and serving, traveling and building a home and family together; three long-distance moves; launching his own firm; teaching at two universities, one of them overseas; a mission trip to Guatemala. (Notice that this first list names the experiences but not yet the *why* and *how*. That's the next move for everyone: add the reasons.)
- *Another participant*, with two milestones, each with its *how*: "Learning that God isn't the author of my pain and struggles - This completely upended my understanding and then my perspective of God." · "My first trip to a freedom retreat - This was my first experience of freedom and transformed my perspective of myself."
- *Another,* finding the thread: after five vivid memories, "I see that a lot of this has feeling a part of something - a family, a culture, part of someone, a covenant. It's all when I felt that I somehow belonged."

You're done when …

- [ ] You've drawn your timeline, with good experiences above the line and hard ones below it.
- [ ] You've chosen five to seven milestones and ranked them by impact.
- [ ] Every milestone has a *what*, a *why* and a *how*.
- [ ] At least one is a valley, named honestly, even if only in a few words.
- [ ] You've marked your turning points and asked, for each one, *What were You shaping in me through this?*

Time: at least two days. The timeline often surfaces memories that need a night's sleep before you can see what they mean.

STEP 14 · MY INFLUENCERS

The prompt. *What people have most influenced your life? Why and how?*

What to do. List everyone who comes to mind: family, teachers, coaches, pastors, mentors, friends, bosses, authors. Include divine contacts, people you may have met only once but who said or did something you've never forgotten. If some of the people who shaped you most did so by hurting you, you may list them in a separate column headed *Shaped me by contrast* (see the *What About* above). You will likely have a fairly long list. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you rank them in order of impact, and to show you the reasons. For each of your top five to seven, write what they gave you and what you now carry because of them.

What to produce. A ranked list of your five to seven most important influencers, each with one or two sentences on *why* they influenced you and *how*: what of theirs you now carry.

Surface answer: *"My mom, my pastor, my wife."* (Good names, but no why and no how.) A different kind of thin answer is just as common: *"I can't list individual names…"* That one, from an actual group, was honest, and it usually means the person hasn't yet looked back slowly enough. Go back to your timeline. Beside each turning point, ask, *Who was there?*

Deep answer: *"Mr. Alvarez, my high school chemistry teacher. He stayed after school twice a week for a whole semester to help me catch up, and he told me I had a scientist's mind when no one else thought I'd finish high school. I became an engineer because of him, and I tutor kids today because he tutored me."*

Worked examples.

– "Duke, because of the lessons he taught me that I've never forgotten."

- "My high school teacher, because of how he exhibited a love for learning."
- "My pastor, because of how he modeled what he preached."
- *Participant A:* his wife; his parents; his brother; and about ten mentors, pastors and business leaders, including the mentor from his weekly discipleship meetings. (Names withheld.)
- *Other participants:* "A friend. Never looked at me as any less than. He saw and drew out the best in me." · "My grandpa: his passion for learning and teaching… there are times when I do things (training somebody, reading, etc.) I still think of everything he imparted in my life." · "An older lady in my church who discipled me and spoke prophetically into my life… She was right."

You're done when …

- [ ] Your list includes people from more than one season of your life, and at least one author or divine contact if you have one.
- [ ] You've ranked your top five to seven, with the Holy Spirit's help, by impact.
- [ ] Every one of them has a *why* and a *how*.
- [ ] You've considered whether anyone shaped you *by contrast*, and decided honestly whether to list them.
- [ ] You've thanked God for at least one of them by name. If they're living and it's appropriate, consider telling them.

Time: at least one day; two if your list is long.

BIG IDEAS

1. God tells His people to remember "the whole way" He has led them, and to mark the turning points (Deuteronomy 8:2; Joshua

4:6–7).

2. The question to ask of every milestone isn't *Why me?* but *What were You shaping in me through this?*
3. The valleys often shape us most. In the darkest valley of Psalm 23, *He* becomes *You*.
4. God shapes us through people. The deepest influence reproduces something genuine, as Paul's did in his "genuine child in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2).
5. Even the people who hurt you belong in your story. Naming them isn't approving of them, and God can work the worst lines into His picture.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Nothing in your story is wasted. God was shaping you through every experience and every person, even the ones you'd never have chosen.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for the whole way You've led me, the mountaintops and the valleys. Thank You for the people You sent: the ones who taught me, the ones who believed in me, and the ones whose faith I now carry. Where people hurt me, I bring those wounds to You, and I ask You to heal what still hurts and to work even those lines into Your picture. Show me what You were shaping in me through it all. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Chris Tiegreen, *The One Year Hearing His Voice Devotional* (2014).
Daily readings on recognizing God's voice in Scripture, circumstances and relationships, including in the story you've already lived.

SUBSTANTIAL

J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* (1988; rev. ed. 2012).
The source of this session's timeline, boundary events, divine contacts and mentors.

ACADEMIC

J. Robert Clinton, *Leadership Emergence Theory* (1989).
Clinton's research manual, with the full catalog of "process items" God uses to shape leaders. Written for classroom use, and dense, but thorough.

LEADING THIS SESSION

This session can take a group somewhere tender very quickly. Before you begin, remind everyone that no one has to share anything from their timeline, and that the valleys stay private unless someone chooses to share them. Read the Caution aloud. If someone becomes distressed, stop and pray with them, and follow up privately; don't try to process trauma in a group setting. The most productive exercise is usually Step 14: invite people to share one influencer and what they now carry because of them. It's often the most encouraging half hour in the course. Group questions: *What's one memorial stone from your life, and what does it mean to you?* and *Who saw potential in you before you saw it in yourself?* Watch attendance closely from here on. In an actual group that worked through these steps, the Shaping steps were where the most people stopped, and the people who wrote the most honestly about their valleys were often the ones who most needed someone to check in with them afterward. Don't ask anyone to retell a valley in the group. If someone's Step 13 has no valleys at all, don't push; it may be an honest answer, or it may be a "not yet."

> If you have questions or comments about this content, or about your personal situation, email us at feedback@thedisciplespath.com.

Next: Session 9, *Your Measure*, asks where you carry authority and where you've already borne fruit: the sphere God has assigned you, and the victories that have shaped you.

SESSION 8 · KINGDOM PURPOSE

Your Story

What has God been doing in the story you've already lived?



Remember the whole way. Mark the turning points, and ask what God was shaping in you.

Joshua 4:6–7
Deuteronomy 8:2

The valleys shape us most. In the darkest valley, *He* becomes *You*.

Psalm 23:4
John 21:15–19

The deepest influence reproduces something genuine in us, even by contrast.

1 Timothy 1:2
Genesis 50:20

SO · NOW

SO

Nothing in your story is wasted. God was shaping you through every experience and every person.

NOW

Draw your timeline, then complete Step 13 (your experiences) and Step 14 (your influencers).

Discovery Steps · Steps 13 and 14

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

Nothing in your story is wasted. God was shaping you through every experience and every person, even the ones you'd never have chosen.

© thedisciplespath.com



YOUR MEASURE

Kingdom Purpose: Shaping

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Your Assigned Field

03 Authority Without Control

04 Victories That Shaped You

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · Map Your Field

The Question

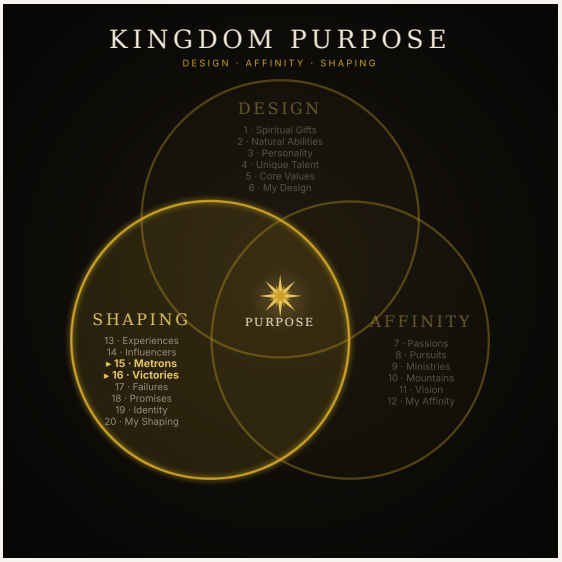
In 1640 a twenty-six-year-old former soldier named Nicolas Herman entered a monastery in Paris. He had been wounded in the Thirty Years' War and was lame for the rest of his life. He entered as a lay brother, not a priest, took the name Brother Lawrence, and was sent to the kitchen. He cooked for the community for years, until his leg got too bad to stand at the stove; then they set him to repairing sandals.

He held no office. He gave no orders to anyone but the pots. And yet people kept seeking him out, first his fellow monks and then visitors from outside, because something about the atmosphere around him was different. When a priest named Joseph de Beaufort asked him about it, Lawrence described his kitchen this way: "The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament." After his death, de Beaufort gathered those conversations and letters into a small book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. It has been read for more than three hundred years.

Brother Lawrence had no authority over anyone. But in his kitchen he carried a different kind of authority, and it changed the place.

So the question is:

Where has God given you authority, and where has He already given you fruit?



You are here: Shaping · Steps 15–16.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You've measured out a portion of the world and placed me in it: my home, my work, the people around me. Show me the places where You've given me authority, and teach me to use it the way Jesus did, to serve and to bless, never to control. Remind me of the victories You've already given me, and let me see what they were for. In Jesus' name, amen.

Your Assigned Field

God assigns each of His people a particular portion of the world to serve in, and faithfulness inside that portion is how it grows. Scripture's word for that portion is *metron*, "measure."

You may have met this word in Kingdom Essentials. Session 9 studied *metron* as one of the ways God speaks: through the specific place He has already put you. This session picks up the same passage and asks a different question: what authority comes with that place?

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 10 in the middle of a dispute. Some visiting teachers in Corinth had been promoting themselves and questioning whether Paul had any right to speak into the church there. Paul refused to play their game: "when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they

are without understanding" (2 Corinthians 10:12). Then he explained where his own authority came from:

> *"But we will not boast beyond certain limits, but will confine our boasting according to the limits of the work (κανόνος) to which God has appointed us, that reaches even as far as you. For we were not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach as far as you, because we were the first to reach as far as you with the gospel about Christ. Nor do we boast beyond certain limits in the work done by others, but we hope that as your faith continues to grow, our work may be greatly expanded among you according to our limits."*
>
> **2 CORINTHIANS 10:13–15**

WORD STUDY

κανών *kanōn* G2583

> **"work"** · 2 Corinthians 10:13

Range. Originally a straight rod or reed used for measuring; then a rule or standard. Thayer gives two senses: "a definitely bounded or fixed space within the limits of which one's power or influence is confined; the province assigned one; one's sphere of activity," and, metaphorically, "any rule or standard." English gets the word *canon* from it. It occurs four times in the New Testament, three of them in this passage (2 Corinthians 10:13, 15, 16) and once in Galatians 6:16.

The sense here. Paul's assigned field. The Greek of verse 13 reads, literally, "according to the *measure* of the *field* which God *apportioned* to us as a measure." Three words stack up: *metron* (measure), *kanōn* (the bounded field) and *merizō* (to divide out, apportion). The NET compresses them into "the limits of the work to which God has appointed us."

Why it carries the argument. Paul's authority in Corinth didn't come from his title or his reputation. It came from assignment: God had apportioned him a field, and Corinth was inside it, because Paul was the first to bring them the gospel. Outside that field, he wouldn't boast. Inside it, he wouldn't back down. That's the shape of the authority Step 15 asks about. It isn't unlimited, and it isn't self-appointed. It's measured out by God, and it has edges.

Source. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

Two things in that passage matter for you.

Your field has edges. Paul wouldn't "boast of work already done in another person's area" (10:16). A measured field means some things are yours to steward and some aren't. Knowing the difference will save you from two opposite mistakes: neglecting the places God has actually given you, and trying to take charge of places He hasn't.

Your field can grow. "As your faith continues to grow, our work may be greatly expanded among you according to our limits" (10:15). The expansion comes *through* faithfulness inside the present field, not by leaving it. Jesus said the same: "The one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much" (Luke 16:10). J. Robert Clinton, who studied how God develops leaders, observed that a leader's sphere of influence is really "the number of people for whom a leader will give an account to God," and that a leader should never try to expand it "as if bigger were better." A larger field isn't a reward to grab. It's a larger account to give.

What does your field include? Most believers have more than one. If you're a parent, your home is part of your *metron*. If you run a business or lead a team, its culture is in your field. If you lead a ministry, a class or a small group, you carry responsibility for its atmosphere. And even if you hold no position at all, you carry something into your workplace, your neighborhood and your friendships that belongs to you and to no one else.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> In an actual group that worked through these steps, most people named the same two fields first: their home, and their work. That's right, and it's where most of us carry the most responsibility. But the answers that taught the most went further.
>
> One woman described a field no title had ever given her. For years, before she knew Christ, she couldn't understand why coworkers kept coming into her office to "unload." Even her bosses did. Patients at the dental office where she worked would ask to have a word with her, and "not about dentistry!" Now, she wrote, "I 'get it'. And now I realize I have a Partner who does most

of the ‘work’.” Her authority had been recognized by the people around her long before she recognized it herself, which is exactly how Clinton said spiritual authority works.

Another woman named her home, her workplace and the class of small children she teaches at church, and described the workplace this way: “We bring God’s presence into a place where people struggle with fear.” That’s authority over an atmosphere, with no authority over any person in it. And a third, listing a ministry team she helps lead, added three honest words that marked its edge: “to an extent.”

PAUSE & REFLECT

Where does your influence already reach, whether or not you hold a title there? Where have you been trying to take charge of something that isn’t yours?

Authority Without Control

The authority God gives you in your field is authority to serve, bless and resist the enemy there. It is never authority over the people in it.

This is the line that has to be drawn hard, because authority is easily abused, especially spiritual authority. Peter wrote to the elders of the churches, the people with the most obvious authority in the room, and told them, “do not lord it over those entrusted to you, but be examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3). Jesus said the rulers of the Gentiles “lord it over them,” and then, “It must not be this way among you!” (Matthew 20:25–26). Your authority in your home doesn’t entitle you to control your spouse. Your authority at work doesn’t entitle you to manipulate your co-workers. Even a parent’s authority over a child is given for the child’s good, not the parent’s.

Clinton put it simply. Spiritual authority, he wrote, is “the right to influence, conferred upon a leader by followers, because of their perception of spirituality in that leader.” It isn’t seized. It’s recognized. And it’s never the goal:

“A leader does not seek spiritual authority; a leader seeks to know God. … Spiritual authority results from

a leader's experience with God."

J. Robert Clinton · Professor of leadership, Fuller Theological Seminary · *The Making of a Leader*, 1988

That's Brother Lawrence exactly. He never sought authority; he sought God in the kitchen, and the authority followed.

So what *is* your authority over, if not people? It's over the spiritual atmosphere of the place: the culture, the tone, what's welcome and what isn't. Jesus sent His disciples out with an instruction that shows what this looks like: "Whenever you enter a house, first say, 'May peace be on this house!' And if a peace-loving person is there, your peace will remain on him, but if not, it will return to you" (Luke 10:5–6). They didn't take over the house. They blessed it, and the blessing either rested there or came back to them.

I believe this reaches further than good manners. Kingdom Essentials Session 13 laid out the authority every believer carries over the enemy's influence: "Submit to God. But resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Where your field reaches, you can use that authority. When a workplace or a home is filled with a critical, hopeless or accusing spirit, you don't have to simply endure it. You can pray over it, quietly and with authority, resist the enemy's influence there, and ask God for peace and encouragement to take its place. Then you live in a way that carries that peace in with you.

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That authority in a place gives you any right to control, pressure or manipulate the people in it.
- That every conflict or bad mood in your office is demonic, or that you should announce spiritual warfare at a staff meeting.
- That you can override anyone's free will by praying over their space.

WHAT I AM SAYING

- That God measures out a field for each believer, and gives real authority within it.
- That the authority is over the atmosphere, not the people: to bless, to serve, to pray and to resist the enemy's influence.

- That authority is recognized, not seized, and it grows out of knowing God.

Where this stays unresolved. Christians who share a high view of Scripture disagree about how much believers should expect to address demonic influence directly, and about whether it attaches to places at all. Kingdom Essentials Session 13 takes up that question more fully. What every tradition agrees on is enough for Step 15: God assigns you a field, you're accountable for how you serve in it, and prayer and blessing change the places where you pray and bless.

Victories That Shaped You

God shapes you through your victories as well as your valleys, and the victories He gives you are meant to be seen.

When David offered to fight Goliath, Saul objected: "You aren't able to go against this Philistine and fight him! You're just a boy!" (1 Samuel 17:33). David answered with his history:

> *"Your servant has been a shepherd for his father's flock. Whenever a lion or bear would come and carry off a sheep from the flock, I would go out after it, strike it down, and rescue the sheep from its mouth… The Lord who delivered me from the lion and the bear will also deliver me from the hand of this Philistine!"*
>
> **1 SAMUEL 17:34–35, 37**

Nobody had watched David fight the lion and the bear. Those were private victories, won alone in a field with his father's sheep. But they were preparation. They taught David what God does, and they gave him the faith to walk into a public battle. That's why Step 16 asks about your victories: past faithfulness is evidence of future faithfulness.

Your lion and bear may not look spiritual at all. One woman in an actual group that worked through these steps began her answer, "Not sure if this is what you're looking for…," and then told how she'd taken up pool when she was young,

decided she wanted to get good at it, and ended up winning tournaments and a division championship in her league. “That was something I set my mind to do, and I did it very well.” It was exactly what the step was looking for. Her coach’s reply is worth keeping: “Your ‘trophies’ are those events/accomplishments where you succeeded at some task… Ask Holy Spirit, where have I succeeded? Your successes may be some time ago. He knows.”

And notice what David said the victory was *for*: “Then all the land will realize that Israel has a God, and all this assembly will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves! For the battle is the Lord’s” (17:46–47). The victory was David’s, but the glory was God’s, and the point was that people would know Him.

Psalm 67 says the same thing about God’s blessing on His people:

> *“May God show us his favor and bless us! May he smile on us! (Selah) Then those living on earth will know what you are like; all nations will know how you deliver* (יְשׁוּעָתֶךָ) *your people.”*
>
> **PSALM 67:1–2**

WORD STUDY

יְשׁוּעָה *yešûʿâ* H3444

> **“deliver”** · Psalm 67:2

Range. Deliverance, salvation, help; also welfare, prosperity and *victory*. It comes from the verb *yāšaʿ* (H3467), “to save,” and it shares its root with the names *Joshua* and, through the Greek, *Jesus*. Brown-Driver-Briggs lists four senses: welfare or prosperity; deliverance; salvation by God, “primarily from external evils, but often with added spiritual idea”; and victory, especially victories God wins for His people. It occurs about seventy-seven times in the Hebrew Bible.

The sense here. The NET turns the noun into a verb, “how you deliver your people”; more literally, “your *yešûʿâ* among all nations.” It’s God’s saving help, seen in the life of His people.

Why it carries the argument. In Hebrew, one word covers *salvation* and *victory*. Every real victory in your life is a small *yešûʿâ*: God's help showing up in your story. That changes how you tell it. You aren't listing achievements. You're listing times God helped, so that "those living on earth will know what you are like." Your victories are His witness. One man in that group wrote his this way. He named taking on leadership of a ministry team, then added what it showed him: "I was able to look back and see God's fingerprints over my journey." What he had learned years earlier, almost by accident, in another church "was preparation for what he planned to do through me" now. That's a victory told as a *yešûʿâ*.

Source. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

In Session 1 you met the promise of Psalm 37:4: "Then you will take delight in the Lord, and he will answer your prayers." The next verse finishes the thought: "Commit your future to the Lord! Trust in him, and he will act on your behalf" (37:5). Many of your victories were exactly that: God acting on your behalf when you trusted Him with something you couldn't control. Believers and unbelievers alike are drawn to that kind of story, because it shows what God is like.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What's your "lion and bear," a private victory nobody else saw, that taught you what God can do?

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn't listing my victories just pride?

For some readers, Step 16 will feel uncomfortable, and the objection is worth stating plainly. *I was taught not to talk about my accomplishments. "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth" (Proverbs 27:2). Pride is the root sin, and making a list of my successes seems like the opposite of humility. Paul said he regarded his achievements "as dung" (Philippians 3:8). Shouldn't I be listing my weaknesses instead?*

There's real wisdom in that. Pride is deadly, and it disguises itself well. Moses warned Israel that success would tempt them to forget God: "Be careful not to say, 'My own ability and skill have gotten me this wealth'" (Deuteronomy 8:17). And Paul asked the proudest church he knew, "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

But notice how Paul ends the very passage this session is built on: "But the one who boasts must boast in the Lord. For it is not the person who commends himself who is approved, but the person the Lord commends" (2 Corinthians 10:17–18). Paul doesn't forbid boasting. He redirects it. And Moses didn't tell Israel to forget their prosperity. He told them to remember who gave it: "You must remember the Lord your God, for he is the one who gives ability to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18).

Here's where I land, and why. I think refusing to name your victories can be a quiet form of ingratitude. One woman in an actual group that worked through these steps solved the problem in a single line before she began her list: "Please Note: ANY 'success' I've had in this life (I believe) is a direct result of God working in and through me." Then she named seven, without embarrassment. If God delivered you, taught you, or used you, the humble response isn't to pretend it didn't happen. It's to say who did it. That's why Step 16 asks you to write down, beside each victory, what God showed you about Himself through it. A victory written that way isn't a trophy. It's a memorial stone.

> **WHAT I AM NOT SAYING**
>
> - That you should publish your list, or measure your worth by your successes.
> - That the size of a victory matters. A private victory over a besetting sin may shape you more than a public promotion.
>
> **WHAT I AM SAYING**
>
> - That naming what God has done is gratitude, not pride, as long as you name Him.
> - That your victories are part of your shaping, and part of His witness.

The Turn

Everything above has been explanation. God measures out a field for each of His people, and it has edges; faithfulness inside it is how it grows. The authority He gives you there is authority to serve, bless and resist the enemy, never authority over the people in it. And the victories He's given you were preparation for what's next and a witness to what He's like: every one of them a small *yešûʿâ*.

Now you map your field and name your victories.

The Experience · Map Your Field

Draw a small circle in the middle of a page and write your name in it. Around it, draw rings, one for each place your influence reaches: your home, your extended family, your workplace or school, your church or ministry, your neighborhood, your friendships, and any online community where people listen to you. Inside each ring, write the names of a few of the people there.

Then pick one ring, the one where the atmosphere most needs to change, and bless it this week. Before you walk in the door, pray quietly: *May peace be on this place.* If there's a critical or hopeless spirit there, resist it in Jesus' name, silently, and ask God for peace and encouragement to take its place. Then watch, and write down anything you notice over the following days.

DISCOVERY STEPS · STEPS 15 AND 16

Use the Listening Rhythm for each step: *ask to be searched; do the work; sit with it; test it with the witnesses; sleep on it.*

STEP 15 · MY METRONS

The prompt. *Where do you believe, or sense, that you have spiritual authority?*

What to do. Start with The Experience and your map. For each ring, ask two questions: *Did God assign me here, by relationship, role or calling?* and *Do the people here recognize something of God in me?* Where both answers are yes, you've found part of your *metron*. For each one, write what kind of atmosphere you're responsible for there, and one way you could bless it

this month. Be honest about edges too: name one place you've been trying to take charge of that isn't yours.

What to produce. Three to six fields where you carry spiritual authority. For each: the basis (relationship, role or calling), the atmosphere you're responsible for, and one way to bless it. Add one sentence naming a field that isn't yours.

Surface answer: *"Everywhere. I'm a child of God."* (True of your identity, but it tells you nothing about your assignment. Paul, of all people, said his field had edges.) The opposite thin answer is more common: *"My work."* That was a real answer in an actual group that worked through these steps, and it's probably true. But two words name a place without describing the atmosphere, the people or one way to bless it. Two other near misses from that group: naming a *kind of ministry* ("people in need of healing and deliverance") instead of a place, and naming a skill ("helping others navigate difficult territory") instead of a field. Step 15 asks *where*, not *what*.

Deep answer: *"My home: I'm responsible for the atmosphere my kids grow up in, and it's been tense since my layoff. The third-shift crew at the plant: I'm not their supervisor, but they come to me when things go wrong, and I've started praying over the break room before shifts. Not mine: my adult sister's marriage. I keep trying to fix it, and I need to go back to praying for it."*

Worked examples.

- "My home."
- "My co-workers."
- "The small group I lead, and the first-time guests who come through it."
- *Another participant:* "I have spiritual authority over my home… I have spiritual authority in my workplace, I fortunately don't stand alone there. We

bring God's presence into a place where people struggle with fear. I have spiritual authority in my classroom where I get to teach little ones about Jesus."

- *Another:* "My immediate encounters with people. Grocery stores. Lines at the movies. However, most often in small group endeavors… Over many years God has shown me how others have naturally gravitated toward me for support and understanding."

You're done when …

- [ ] You've mapped your rings and named the people in them.
- [ ] You've listed three to six fields, each with its basis, its atmosphere and one way to bless it.
- [ ] None of your fields gives you authority *over* a person; each is about serving, blessing and praying.
- [ ] You've named one field that isn't yours.
- [ ] You've blessed at least one place, as The Experience describes, and written down what you noticed.

Time: at least two days: one to map, and at least one to pray over a place and watch.

STEP 16 · MY VICTORIES

The prompt. *What successes have most influenced your life? Why and how?*

What to do. Go back to your timeline from Session 8 and look above the line. Ask yourself: *Where have I enjoyed success? Where have I met big goals, dreams or desires?* Include private victories, your "lion and bear," as well as public ones: victories in your family, education, work, ministry, health, relationships and your walk with God. Choose the five to seven that shaped you most. For each one, write what happened, *why* it

mattered, *how* it shaped you, and one line on *what it showed you about God*.

What to produce. Five to seven victories, ranked by their impact on you, each with its *why*, its *how* and what it showed you about God.

Surface answer: *"Obtaining a job in my current place of employment and continuing to promote and receive opportunities I never would have imagined."* (A real answer, and a real victory. "Never would have imagined" hints at what it showed him about God. Saying that part out loud is the next move.)

Deep answer: *"Finishing my degree at forty-five, while working full time. Why: I'd quit twice and believed I wasn't smart enough. How: it broke a lie I'd believed since high school, and it's why I started mentoring adults who are going back to school. What it showed me about God: He was patient with my timeline and faithful to finish what He started."*

Worked examples.

- "I published and presented my content to large audiences."
- "I led a small group resulting in greater understanding of God's character."
- "I won the promotion at my workplace for which I'd strived for years."
- "I led a team to successfully complete a strategically critical project."
- *Participant A:* his marriage; good grades from an early age through an MBA, and professional certifications; award-winning trumpet playing in high school and college; success in sales and in founding his own firm; football, baseball, basketball and rugby; effectiveness in financial ministry, and serving as a deacon; "the people God has given me." (Notice how broad the list is: seven different arenas.

The next move is to add *what each one showed him about God*.)

- *Another participant:* "Losing a ton of weight - God showed me the possibilities of being disciplined and working hard with consistency to achieve incremental results that stack up to huge change." (One victory, with what it showed him in the same sentence.)
- *Another:* winning a pool championship she'd set her mind to. A private, unlikely "lion and bear."
- *Another,* describing years of volunteer work starting a resource room for cancer patients and a closet of baby clothes for mothers in need: "It was an introduction to really noticing the needs of others and doing something about it."

You're done when …

- [ ] You've looked above the line on your Session 8 timeline, and asked where you've met big goals, dreams or desires.
- [ ] Your list includes at least one private victory nobody else saw.
- [ ] You've chosen five to seven and ranked them by impact.
- [ ] Every one has a *why*, a *how* and what it showed you about God.
- [ ] You've thanked God for each one by name.

Time: at least one day.

BIG IDEAS

1. God measures out a field for each of His people, a *kanōn* with edges (2 Corinthians 10:13). Faithfulness inside it is how it grows (Luke 16:10).

2. Spiritual authority is over the atmosphere of a place, never over the people in it (1 Peter 5:3; Luke 10:5–6).
3. Authority is recognized, not seized. It grows out of knowing God.
4. Private victories prepare you for public ones: the lion and the bear came before Goliath (1 Samuel 17:37).
5. Every victory is a small *yešûʿâ*, God's help in your story, given so that people "will know what you are like" (Psalm 67:2). Name Him when you name it.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God measures out your field; your part is to bless it, serve it and pray over it, and to give Him the glory for every victory in it.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for the field You've measured out for me. I don't want anyone else's. Teach me to bless my home, my work and every place my influence reaches, and never to use it to control anyone. Thank You for every victory You've given me, the ones people saw and the ones they didn't. They were Yours. Let them show the people around me what You're like. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (first published 1692).

Conversations and letters of a kitchen monk who learned to carry God's presence into ordinary work. Short, and free online in several translations.

SUBSTANTIAL

Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (2012).

How faith shapes ordinary work, and how believers can serve and bless the places they work without controlling them.

ACADEMIC

Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (2005).

A detailed commentary on the Greek text, including the difficult wording of 2 Corinthians 10:13–16.

LEADING THIS SESSION

Two conversations will need care. The first is authority: someone will hear “spiritual authority in your home” as permission to control a spouse or adult child. Read the What I Am Not Saying aloud and hold the line: authority over the atmosphere, never over the people. The second is victories: some people will be embarrassed to name them, and others will struggle to think of any. Help both groups by asking for *private* victories, the lion and the bear. The most productive exercise is The Experience: have people share one ring they plan to bless this week, and follow up next time. Group questions: *Where does your influence reach that you’ve never thought of as a field?* and *What’s one victory that showed you what God is like?* Two notes from an actual group that worked through these steps. At Step 15, most people named “home” and “work” and stopped; ask, *Where do people come to you without being asked?* That question surfaced the richest answers. At Step 16, people apologized for victories that didn’t seem spiritual (“Not sure if this is what you’re looking for…”). Tell them the lion and the bear weren’t spiritual either.

> If you have questions or comments about this content, or about your personal situation, email us at feedback@thedisciplespath.com.

Next: Session 10, *Your Refining*, turns below the line: the trials and failures that shaped you, and the promises God has spoken over you on the other side of them.

SESSION 9 · KINGDOM PURPOSE

Your Measure

Where has God given you authority, and where has He already given you fruit?



God measures out a field with edges. Faithfulness inside it is how it grows.

2 Corinthians 10:13–15
Luke 16:10

Authority over the atmosphere, never over the people. Bless it, serve it, pray over it.

1 Peter 5:3
Luke 10:5–6

The lion and the bear came before Goliath. Every victory is God's help in your story.

1 Samuel 17:37
Psalm 67:1–2

SO · NOW

SO

God measures out your field; your part is to bless it, serve it and pray over it, and to give Him the glory for every victory in it.

NOW

Map your field and bless one place, then complete Step 15 (your metrons) and Step 16 (your victories).

Discovery Steps · Steps 15 and 16

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God measures out your field; your part is to bless it, serve it and pray over it, and to give Him the glory for every victory in it.

© thedisciplespath.com

10

YOUR REFINING

Kingdom Purpose: Shaping

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Treasure in Clay Jars

03 Stray Lines

04 Promises Kept

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · Two Columns

The Question

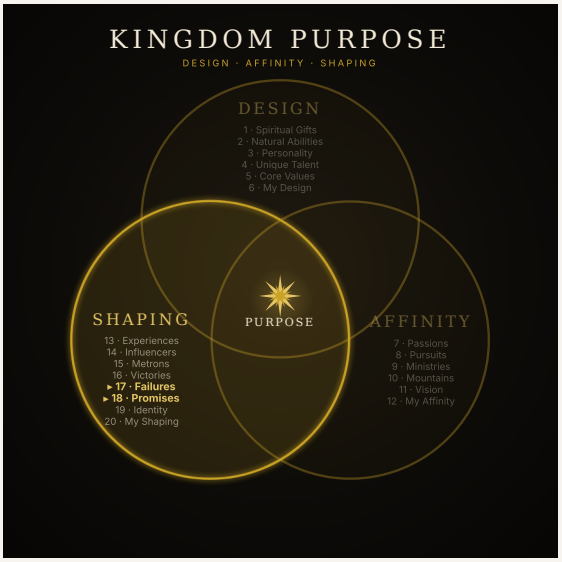
In the early 1970s, Charles Colson was one of the most powerful men in Washington. As special counsel to President Nixon, he had a reputation for doing whatever it took, and he later admitted that he'd been valuable to the president because he was willing to be ruthless in getting things done. Then the Watergate scandal broke. Facing prosecution, Colson was given a copy of C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* by a friend, and he gave his life to Christ. In June 1974 he pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice, and he spent seven months in a federal prison in Alabama.

Colson walked out of prison with his reputation destroyed and his career over. In 1976 he founded Prison Fellowship, which grew into the largest outreach to prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families in the United States, and then spread around the world. Years later he wrote, "My greatest humiliation – being sent to prison – was the beginning of God's greatest use of my life."

His worst failure didn't disqualify him. It became the place his calling came from.

So the question is:

What did your hardest seasons build in you, and what has God promised on the other side of them?



You are here: Shaping · Steps 17–18.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You know every failure in my story, the ones I caused and the ones that happened to me. I don't want to hide them from You, and I don't want to be defined by them. Show me what You were building in me through them. Then remind me of every promise You've spoken over my life, and give me faith to hold on to them. In Jesus' name, amen.

Treasure in Clay Jars

Your failures and trials are not detours from God's purpose for you. They're some of the most important material He shapes you with, because they make it obvious where the power really comes from.

Paul knew this from the inside. He had been beaten, imprisoned, shipwrecked and rejected, and his critics in Corinth used his weaknesses against him. His answer was not to hide them:

> *"For God, who said 'Let light shine out of darkness,' is the one who shined in our hearts to give us the light of the*

glorious knowledge of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in clay (ὀστρακίνοις) *jars, so that the extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are experiencing trouble on every side, but are not crushed; we are perplexed, but not driven to despair; we are persecuted, but not abandoned; we are knocked down, but not destroyed."*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:6–9

WORD STUDY

ὀστράκινος *ostrakinos* G3749

> **"clay"** · 2 Corinthians 4:7

Range. Made of clay; earthen, earthenware. It comes from *ostrakon*, a piece of baked clay; broken pieces of pottery were so common in the ancient world that people used them as scrap paper. Thayer notes that the word carries "the added suggestion of frailty." Strong's defines it as "earthenware, i.e. clayey; by implication, frail." It occurs only twice in the New Testament: here, and in 2 Timothy 2:20, where Paul contrasts vessels "of wood and of earthenware" with vessels of gold and silver.

The sense here. Ordinary, cheap, breakable pottery: the kind of jar a household used every day and threw away when it cracked. Paul puts the most valuable thing in the universe, "the light of the glorious knowledge of God," inside the least valuable container he could think of.

Why it carries the argument. The mismatch is the point: "so that the extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." If the jar were gold, people would admire the jar. Because it's clay, and visibly cracked, they notice the light coming through it. Your failures are the cracks. They don't disqualify you from carrying the treasure. They make it unmistakable whose treasure it is.

Source. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

A few chapters later, Paul describes a weakness he begged God to remove. God's answer was no: "My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." And Paul's response was remarkable: "So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me… for whenever I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

This is why the failures in your story may shape you more than any victory could. They humble you, and they make you useful to other people in a way success never can. Think about the testimonies you actually remember. People may applaud a success story, but the stories that stay with us are the ones about a failure someone came through. You may not relate to the details of someone else's failure, but you understand the pain and disappointment, and you listen differently to someone who has been there. Jesus told Peter, the night before his worst failure, "When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). Peter's usefulness to his brothers came through his failure, not around it.

In Session 1 you met Paul's promise: "And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Notice the first three words: *and we know*. Paul doesn't say "we hope" or "we suspect." If what you're walking through isn't good yet, God isn't done with it.

J. Robert Clinton found the same pattern in the leaders he studied. He called it *negative preparation*:

> *"In negative preparation God wants to break you loose from a situation in order to move you on to something you might not otherwise choose."*
>
> J. Robert Clinton · Professor of leadership, Fuller Theological Seminary · *The Making of a Leader*, 1988

Clinton also noticed that "crises can drive one to God or away from Him." The failure itself doesn't decide which. What you do with it does.

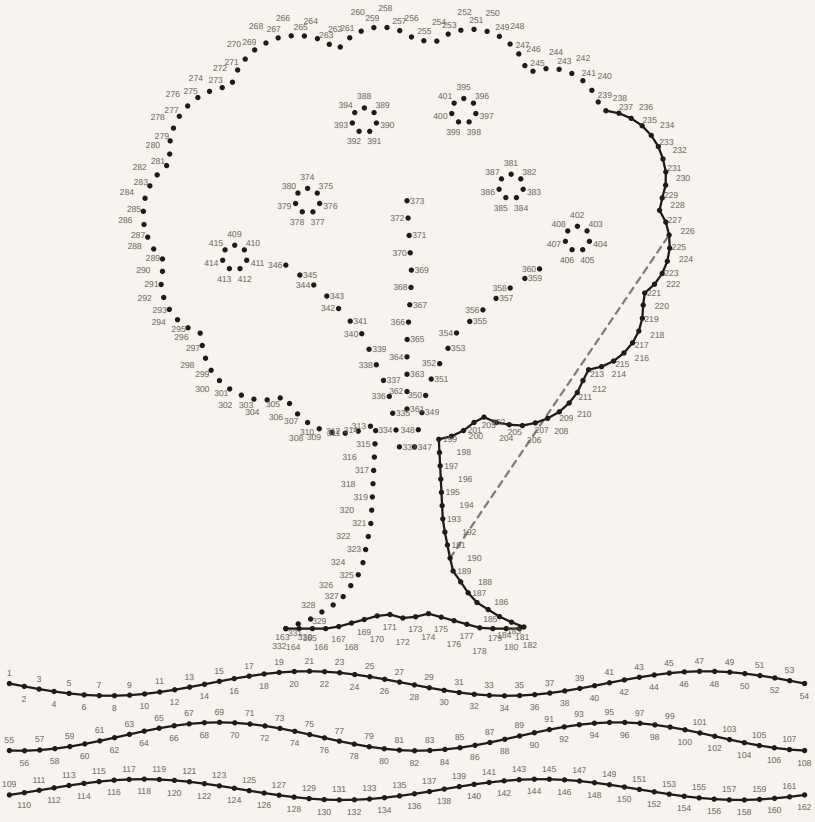
PAUSE & REFLECT

Which crack in your jar has let the most light through? Who has been helped because you went through it?

Stray Lines

Some of the failures in your story were things that happened to you. Others were lines you drew yourself. God works both kinds into the picture, and that's why Step 17 looks at them honestly instead of skipping them.

In Session 1 you met the problem of stray lines. Children working a dot-to-dot get impatient, guess at the picture, and skip ahead, connecting dot 14 to dot 30. Here is the picture you've been watching, with one of those stray lines on it:



Dot 238 of 415, with a stray line. Someone skipped from dot 190 to dot 226, and the dashed line cuts straight across the picture. It's still there. But the right path picks up again at the next dot and goes on around it, and when the picture is finished, the stray line will be part of what you see.

Abraham drew a line like that. God had promised him a son "from your own body" (Genesis 15:4), and Abraham believed Him (15:6). But ten years later there was still no child, and Sarai suggested a shortcut: "Since the Lord has prevented me from having children, have sexual relations with my servant. Perhaps I can have a family by her." And "Abram did what Sarai told him" (16:2). Ishmael was born. The consequences of that stray line ran through Abraham's family for generations. But God didn't take the page away. Fourteen years later, Isaac was born, exactly as promised.

Clinton had a name for Abraham's kind of failure. He called it a *flesh act*: a time when "guidance is presumed and decisions are made either hastily or without proper discernment of God's choice." It's what anxious adults do with the picture: we decide what it must be and skip the slow dots. Clinton also found that God uses flesh acts to teach lessons "about what not to do in the future," lessons that come "in no other way."

John Mark's story shows the same grace. On Paul's first missionary journey, "John left them and returned to Jerusalem" (Acts 13:13). We're not told why. We are told that it cost him: when Barnabas wanted to take Mark on the next journey, "Paul insisted that they should not take along this one who had left them," and the disagreement was so sharp that Paul and Barnabas parted ways (15:38–39). Mark had failed publicly, and one of the great leaders of the church had judged him unreliable. But the story didn't end there. Years later, writing from prison near the end of his life, Paul asked for him by name: "Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is a great help to me in ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). The stray line was still there. The picture had gone on around it.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> In an actual group that worked through these steps, people wrote about their hardest seasons with real courage: divorce, betrayal, a spouse's long illness, the deaths of people they loved. Those stories belong to the people who lived them, and they aren't retold here. But one pattern in the group is worth noticing. Almost everything people listed was a trial that had *happened to* them. Only three or four of the eleven named a failure of their own.
>
> The ones who did showed what this step is for. One woman wrote about not bringing her father into the life of her church while he was still well enough to come: "if I did not disciple one of my own loved ones… How can I disciple others???" And then, in the next breath: "I know the Lord forgives me. He and I are planning for the future discipleship endeavors I immerse myself in." The stray line was named, forgiven, and already being worked into the next part of the picture. One man listed failing out of college, then noticed that if he hadn't, he'd never have taken the job where his daughter's story began.
>
> Some trials don't have a "what God built" yet. One woman answered the step in a single line about a death that had made her question God and her faith. That's an honest answer. Another man named a year and more of closed doors in a job search, and wrote what he could see so far: "God is developing my capacity and willingness to trust and wait on him."

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That sin doesn’t matter because God will use it anyway. Abraham’s shortcut had real consequences, and so do ours.
- That every trial is a failure, or that every failure is your fault. Not making a team, losing a job in a layoff or living through a divorce you didn’t want are trials, not sins.
- That you have to understand what God was doing in a failure before you can list it.

WHAT I AM SAYING

- That God doesn’t take the page away. He lets you find the right dot and start again.
- That your failures and trials are part of your shaping, and they often shape you more deeply than your victories.
- That a failure you’ve brought to God can become the place where you’re most useful to other people.

CAUTION

Step 17 asks you to write about the hardest parts of your story, and for some people that includes trauma, abuse, addiction, betrayal or loss that still hurts. Please don't work through trauma alone in a journal. If a memory surfaces that overwhelms you, stop, and talk with someone you trust: a pastor, a mature friend or a counselor. Kingdom Essentials Sessions 18 through 21 walk through forgiveness and freedom in Christ. If you're carrying guilt over something you did, bring it to God first: "But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). You don't have to write down every detail to complete Step 17. You can name a hard season in a few words, note that God was there, and come back to it later. This course can wait while you get the help you need.

Promises Kept

God has spoken promises over your life, in Scripture and often through other believers, and He keeps every one of them. That's why this course puts your failures and your promises side by side.

Near the end of his life, Joshua gathered Israel's leaders and reminded them of something they had watched with their own eyes for decades:

> *"Look, today I am about to die. You know with all your heart and being that not even one of all the faithful promises the Lord your God made to you is left unfulfilled (נָפַל); every one was realized – not one promise is unfulfilled!"*
>
> **JOSHUA 23:14**

WORD STUDY

נָפַל *nāpal* H5307

> **“unfulfilled”** · Joshua 23:14

Range. To fall. It’s one of the most common verbs in the Hebrew Bible, occurring about 435 times, and Strong’s calls it a word used “in a great variety of applications”: falling by accident or in battle, a building collapsing, a person falling on their face in worship, an army falling on its enemy. Brown-Driver-Briggs lists a special sense for words and promises: to *fall*, meaning to fail to be accomplished.

The sense here. The Hebrew says, literally, “not one word has *fallen* from all the good words the Lord your God spoke concerning you… not one word of them has *fallen*.” The NET renders it “left unfulfilled.” A promise that fails is a promise that falls to the ground. The same idiom appears in Joshua 21:45, at the end of the conquest, and in 1 Samuel 3:19, where the NET says of the young prophet Samuel, “None of his prophecies fell to the ground unfulfilled.”

Why it carries the argument. Joshua’s audience had lived through forty years in the desert, a generation of funerals and seven years of war. From inside those years, plenty of God’s promises must have looked like they were falling. From the end, Joshua could see that not one had. That’s the perspective Step 18 asks you to borrow. Some of the promises you’re holding may look, from where you stand, as if they’ve hit the ground. They haven’t. God’s words don’t fall.

Source. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Strong’s Concordance via Bible Hub.

One man in an actual group that worked through these steps was living in the middle of that kind of season. Two years earlier he had sensed God promising him work that would greatly help the homeless community. Since then, he wrote, “every door keeps closing on me… I wonder if I made it up or if I am waiting for nothing. Is this Goal too High for me?” His coach reminded him how long Joseph

waited, and Moses. By the end of the course, his mission statement still had the homeless at its center. From inside the waiting, a promise can look as if it's falling. That doesn't mean it has.

Paul says the same about every promise God has made: "For every one of God's promises are 'Yes' in him; therefore also through him the 'Amen' is spoken, to the glory we give to God" (2 Corinthians 1:20). Kingdom Essentials Session 5 studied that verse and the word *promise* in it. Every promise of God finds its yes in Christ.

Step 18 asks about two kinds of promises.

Promises in Scripture that God has made personal to you. Most believers have a few verses that God has used, again and again, to speak to them: a verse they held on to in a hard season, or one that seems to leap off the page every time they read it. Kingdom Essentials Session 9 called this a *rhēma* word. Read those verses in context. God's promise to the exiles in Jeremiah 29:11, "I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you," was spoken to a people who would wait seventy years to see it (29:10). It still reveals God's heart for you, but it doesn't promise you a comfortable year.

Prophetic words spoken over you by other believers. Joel promised that a day was coming when God would "pour out my Spirit on all kinds of people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy" (Joel 2:28). Peter announced at Pentecost that the day had come (Acts 2:16–17), and I believe the gift is still given today (Kingdom Essentials Session 10 makes that case). Timothy had received words like that. Paul reminded him of them twice: "Do not neglect the spiritual gift you have, given to you and confirmed by prophetic words when the elders laid hands on you" (1 Timothy 4:14), and "I put this charge before you, Timothy my child, in keeping with the prophecies once spoken about you, in order that with such encouragement you may fight the good fight" (1:18). Notice what the prophecies were *for*: they were encouragement to fight with. When Timothy was discouraged, Paul handed him back the words God had spoken over him.

That's what prophecy is for. "The one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement, and consolation" (1 Corinthians 14:3). A true prophetic word will usually confirm something God has already been doing in you rather than introduce something completely foreign, and it will almost always leave you strengthened rather than afraid.

Don't be discouraged if you can't think of one. In an actual group that worked through these steps, three of the nine people who answered Step 18 said they weren't sure anyone had ever spoken a prophetic word over them. "Honestly, I don't know," one wrote, and listed the Scripture she had clung to through her family's hardest years instead. That's a complete answer. Another was surprised to realize that something people had said about her for years might count. The closest thing to a prophetic word she could think of, she wrote, was a former boss telling her she had a heart for God, and "I've been nicknamed Barnabas more than once." Barnabas was the nickname the apostles gave a man named Joseph, and Luke explains it: "which is translated 'son of encouragement'" (Acts 4:36). When the people around you keep naming the same thing in you, it may be worth testing whether God has been saying it through them.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What's one promise, from Scripture or spoken over you, that you've held on to through a hard season? Has any of it already come true?

WHAT ABOUT …

How do I test a prophetic word someone spoke over me?

This question matters, and the concern behind it is serious. *People have said all kinds of things over me "in the name of the Lord." Some of it was encouraging. Some of it was strange. One person told me God said I'd marry someone I barely knew. Another "word" felt like a way to get me to do what the speaker wanted. And I've watched churches get hurt by prophecies that never came true. How am I supposed to know which words were really from God, and why should I build anything on them?*

Much of that should be acknowledged plainly. False and careless prophecy is real, and Scripture warns about it directly: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to determine if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Jesus said, "Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves" (Matthew 7:15). People have been manipulated, frightened and misled by words that were never from God.

But notice that Scripture's answer to bad prophecy isn't *no* prophecy. It's tested prophecy. "Do not extinguish the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt. But examine all things; hold fast to what is good. Stay away from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:19–22). And in the church at Corinth, "Two or three prophets should speak and the others should evaluate what is said" (1 Corinthians 14:29).

Here's where I land, and why. I believe God still speaks prophetically through His people, and that the words He speaks are meant to be tested, not simply swallowed or dismissed. Here are the tests I'd apply, drawn from those passages and from the witnesses you learned in Session 2:

- **Does it agree with Scripture?** No true word from God contradicts His written word.

- **Does it strengthen, encourage or console?** That's what prophecy is for (1 Corinthians 14:3). A word that leaves you afraid, controlled or condemned deserves serious suspicion.
- **What does the speaker's life show?** "You will recognize them by their fruit" (Matthew 7:16).
- **Do mature believers who know you confirm it?** "The others should evaluate what is said." Take the word to your witness.
- **Does it fit what God has already been doing in you?** Most true prophetic words confirm; few introduce something entirely new.
- **What happens over time?** Scripture's oldest test is fulfillment: "whenever a prophet speaks in my name and the prediction is not fulfilled, then I have not spoken it" (Deuteronomy 18:22).

> WHAT I AM NOT SAYING
>
> - That you have to accept every word spoken over you, or that you should make a major decision on the strength of one prophetic word alone.
> - That anyone who has spoken a mistaken word is a false prophet.
>
> WHAT I AM SAYING
>
> - That God still speaks through His people, and His words are meant to encourage you and give you something to fight with (1 Timothy 1:18).
> - That every prophetic word should be tested by Scripture, by its fruit, by mature witnesses and by time, and only then held fast.

Where this stays unresolved. Two questions don't resolve neatly. First, timing: some prophetic words in Scripture were fulfilled quickly and others took generations, so "it hasn't happened yet" doesn't prove a word false. Second, conditions: some prophecies depended on how people responded. Jonah announced, "At the end of forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!", and when the city repented, "God relented concerning the judgment he had threatened" (Jonah 3:4, 10). Christians also disagree about whether the gift of prophecy continues at all; Kingdom Essentials Session 5 lays out that

disagreement fairly. What everyone can agree on is Paul's instruction: examine everything, and hold on to what is good.

The Turn

Everything above has been explanation. Your failures and trials are treasure in clay jars: the cracks let the light through, and make it plain that the power is God's. God works both kinds of stray lines into the picture, the ones others drew on your page and the ones you drew yourself, as He did with Abraham and John Mark. And He keeps every promise He speaks: not one of His words falls to the ground.

Now you look honestly at your hardest seasons, and then at the promises on the other side of them.

The Experience · Two Columns

Before you begin Step 17, go back to your Session 8 timeline and look *below* the line.

Draw a line down the middle of a fresh page. On the left, write the trials and failures that affected you most, a few words each. On the right, across from each one, write what God built in you through it, if you can see it yet. If you can't, leave the right side blank for now and write, *Not yet.*

Then pray over the blanks. Ask God to show you what He was doing, and, if any of them still hurt, to heal them. Finally, write one promise from Scripture across the bottom of the page. Step 18 starts there.

DISCOVERY STEPS · STEPS 17 AND 18

Use the Listening Rhythm for each step: *ask to be searched; do the work; sit with it; test it with the witnesses; sleep on it.*

STEP 17 · MY FAILURES

The prompt. *What trials or disappointments have most impacted you? Why and how?*

What to do. Start with The Experience and your two columns. Include both kinds: trials that happened to

you, and failures you caused. Choose the three to five that shaped you most. For each one, write *what happened* (in as few words as you need), *why it hurt*, *how it shaped you*, and *what God built in you through it*, or "not yet" if you can't see it. If a failure involved your own sin, note whether you've brought it to God. If it involved someone else's sin against you, note whether forgiveness is still in process. If any memory overwhelms you, stop and follow the Caution above.

What to produce. Three to five trials or failures, each with its *what*, *why*, *how* and *what God built*. Mark any that are still "not yet."

Surface answer: *"Lost my job in 2009. It was hard, but God got me through it."* (True, and good to say, but it names no hurt, no shaping and nothing God built.)

Deep answer: *"Lost my job in 2009. Why it hurt: I'd built my whole identity on being the one who provided, and I hid it from my kids for a month. How it shaped me: it broke my pride, and it's why I now lead the job-transition ministry at church. What God built: I learned my worth isn't my paycheck, and I learned to ask for help. Still 'not yet': I'm not sure I've forgiven the manager who let me go."*

Worked examples.

- "Fired from my first job after graduating college."
- "Didn't get the leadership position I sought."
- *Participant A:* not making the eighth-grade basketball team; being fired from his first job after college; a divorce; the deaths of friends and family members. (Notice the range: a childhood disappointment, a professional failure and deep losses. The next move is to add *why* and *how* for each.)
- *Another participant*, a failure she owned: "Not involving my Dad with the Church when he was more able to participate… I know the Lord forgives

me. He and I are planning for the future discipleship endeavors I immerse myself in."

– *Another,* a trial still in progress: "Year+ of disappointment in job hunt - God is developing my capacity and willingness to trust and wait on him."

You're done when …

- [ ] You've looked below the line on your Session 8 timeline.
- [ ] You've listed three to five trials or failures, including at least one you caused, if there is one.
- [ ] Each has a *what*, a *why*, a *how* and a *what God built*, or an honest "not yet."
- [ ] You've brought any unconfessed failure to God, and noted any forgiveness still in process.
- [ ] You've stopped to get help if anything overwhelmed you.

Time: at least two days. Don't rush this one. It's the hardest step in the course for many people.

STEP 18 · MY PROMISES

The prompt. *What prophetic words have been spoken over you, or what promises in Scripture do you cling to?*

What to do. Make two lists. First, the promises in Scripture God has made personal to you: the verses that keep catching your eye and imagination, or that carried you through a hard season. Look each one up and read it in context. Second, any prophetic words other believers have spoken or prayed over you. For each one, write who spoke it, roughly when, and what they said, as close to their words as you can remember. Then test each prophetic word using the six questions in this session's *What About*, and mark it *held fast*, *waiting* or *set aside*. Finally, go back to Step 17 and look for any promise that answers one of your failures. Two

cautions. Make sure each verse is a promise rather than a command; a verse that tells you to *be* something is God's call to you, not His pledge to you. And if no one has ever spoken a prophetic word over you, say so, and give your time to the Scripture list. Ask your witness, too: *What have people said about me, more than once, that might have been God?*

What to produce. Three to five Scripture promises (with references, read in context), and any prophetic words you've received, each with who, when, what, and your test result.

Surface answer: *"Jeremiah 29:11."* (A good verse, but with no context, no story of how God made it personal, and no test. It was also the verse named most often in an actual group that worked through these steps. Read it in context, as this session suggests, and then ask which verse is *yours*.)

Deep answer: *"Isaiah 43:2, 'When you pass through the waters, I am with you.' My pastor's wife read it to me the week of my father's funeral, and it's come back to me in every crisis since. A prophetic word: at a conference in 2016, a woman I'd never met told me I'd 'teach young mothers to hear God's voice.' Tested: it strengthened me; it fits my passion from Step 7; my witness confirmed it. Held fast. Two years later I started leading a moms' group."*

Worked examples.

- "I will help feed the nations, physically and spiritually."
- "I will bring advanced technology to churches to execute their mission."
- *Participant A:* that he would use video and technology to teach; that he and his wife would have a ministry involving children; that the name of his firm described its calling, "opening doors for people, finances and ministry"; a picture of himself

immersed in honey, a sweetness God wanted to surround him with; that he would help feed the nations, physically and spiritually. (Notice how several of these line up with his vision in Step 11. That's the kind of confirmation to look for.)

- *Other participants:* "He calls me 'messenger' - He will use me to deliver his words to those who allow themselves to remain in bondage." · "You're a watchman on the walls. You're a teacher. I see you running, carrying a torch, bringing light into darkness." · A word she reminds the Lord of: "if I take care of His business He would take care of mine."
- *Another:* no prophetic word she could name, but a former boss who said she had a heart for God, and a nickname, Barnabas, given to her "more than once." (Test it the same way.)

You're done when …

- [ ] You've listed three to five Scripture promises and read each one in its context.
- [ ] You've written down every prophetic word you can remember, with who, when and what.
- [ ] You've tested each prophetic word with the six questions, and marked it *held fast*, *waiting* or *set aside*.
- [ ] You've looked for a promise that answers at least one of your Step 17 failures.
- [ ] You've thanked God that not one of His words falls to the ground.

Time: at least one day; longer if you need to find old journals or ask people what they remember speaking over you.

BIG IDEAS

1. We carry the treasure of the gospel in *ostrakinos* jars, cheap and breakable, “so that the extraordinary power belongs to God” (2 Corinthians 4:7). Failures are the cracks the light comes through.
2. Your failures often shape you more deeply than your victories, and they make you useful to people in pain: “When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32).
3. God doesn’t erase stray lines; He works them into the picture, the ones others drew and the ones you drew yourself, as He did with Abraham and John Mark.
4. Not one of God’s words falls to the ground (Joshua 23:14). Every promise is “Yes” in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20).
5. Prophetic words are for encouragement to fight with (1 Timothy 1:18). Test every one; hold fast to what is good.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God wastes nothing: He turns your failures into the cracks His light shines through, and not one of His promises falls to the ground.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You that You didn’t take the page away when I drew the wrong lines, and that You’ve been with me in every trial. I give You my failures and my disappointments. Heal what still hurts, and use every crack to let Your light through. Thank You for every promise You’ve spoken over me. I hold them fast, and

I trust that not one of Your words will fall to the ground. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Charles Colson, *Born Again* (1976).
Colson's own account of his conversion and his months in prison. Honest about failure, and a vivid picture of grace.

SUBSTANTIAL

Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Voice of God* (1996).
A former seminary professor's careful case for how God speaks today, including prophecy, with practical guidance on testing what you hear.

ACADEMIC

Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (1988; rev. ed. 2000).
A widely cited study of what New Testament prophecy was, how it was evaluated, and how it differs from Scripture. Read it to hear the strongest careful case for testing prophecy rather than dismissing it.

LEADING THIS SESSION

This may be the most tender session in the course. Read the Caution aloud before you begin, and make clear that no one has to share anything from Step 17. If people do share, receive it without fixing it; don't rush to the silver lining. Failures come before promises on purpose, so make sure the group gets to Step 18 before you close. The *What About* will draw out people who have been hurt by careless prophecy; honor that, and walk through the six tests together. Group questions: *What crack in your jar has let the most light through?* and *What promise has God spoken over you that you're still waiting for?* Two notes from an actual group that worked through these steps. At Step 17, almost everyone listed trials that happened to them and very few named a failure of their own; gently invite people to look for one, without pressing anyone to share it. At Step 18, a third of the group weren't sure they'd ever received a prophetic word. Make sure they leave knowing that a Scripture-only answer is complete. If someone is waiting on a delayed promise, point them to Joseph and Moses, and to the *nāpal* word study. Don't offer a reason for the delay. Scripture rarely gives one, and a guessed reason can become a blame mechanism.

> If you have questions or comments about this content, or about your personal situation, email us at feedback@thedisciplespath.com.

Next: Session 11, *Your Name*, asks who God says you are, and then asks you to gather Steps 13–19 into your Shaping statement.

SESSION 10 · KINGDOM PURPOSE

Your Refining

What did your hardest seasons build in you, and what has God promised on the other side of them?



Failures are the cracks the light comes through, so the power is plainly God's.

2 Corinthians 4:7
2 Corinthians 12:9

God doesn't erase stray lines; He works them into the picture.

Genesis 16:2
2 Timothy 4:11

Not one of God's words falls to the ground. Test prophetic words; hold fast to the good.

Joshua 23:14
1 Timothy 1:18

SO · NOW

SO

God wastes nothing: He turns your failures into the cracks His light shines through, and not one of His promises falls to the ground.

NOW

Make your two columns, then complete Step 17 (your failures) and Step 18 (your promises).

Discovery Steps · Steps 17 and 18

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God wastes nothing: He turns your failures into the cracks His light shines through, and not one of His promises falls to the ground.

© thedisciplespath.com

11

YOUR NAME

Kingdom Purpose: Shaping

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 The Name God Gives

03 The Refiner’s Fire

04 Naming Your Shaping

05 The Turn

06 The Experience · Listening for Your Name

The Question

Jacob spent the night before the most frightening day of his life alone by a river. Twenty years earlier he had cheated his brother Esau out of his birthright and his blessing, and now Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men. That night, “a man wrestled with him until daybreak” (Genesis 32:24). When the man couldn’t overpower him, he dislocated Jacob’s hip with a touch. Jacob still wouldn’t let go: “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

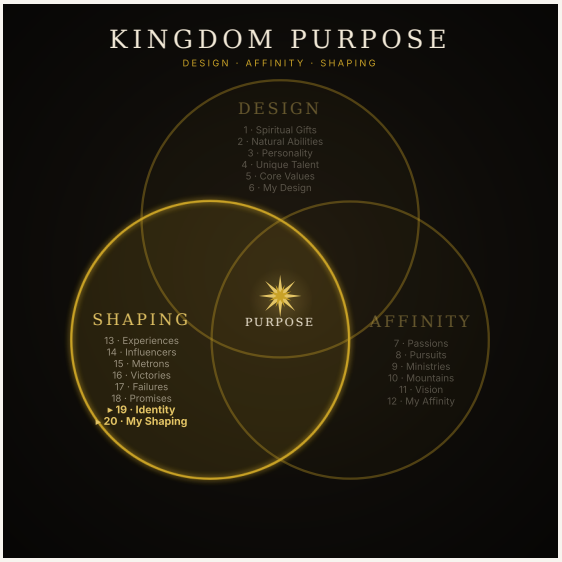
Then the man asked him a strange question: “What is your name?” (32:27).

It wasn’t a request for information. Jacob’s name had followed him all his life. He was born “with his hand clutching Esau’s heel” (25:26), and the name sounded like it: *heel-grabber*. When he stole Esau’s blessing, Esau spat the name back at him: “‘Jacob’ is the right name for him! He has tripped me up two times!” (27:36). To answer the man’s question, Jacob had to say out loud the name that described the worst of him.

“No longer will your name be Jacob,” the man told him, “but Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have prevailed” (32:28). Jacob walked away from that river with a new name and a limp. “The sun rose over him as he crossed over Penuel, but he was limping because of his hip” (32:31). The name told him who God said he was. The limp reminded him how he’d been shaped.

So the question is:

Who does God say you are, and what has He been refining you into?



You are here: Shaping · Steps 19–20.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You're the only one with the right to name me. I lay down every name the world, the enemy and my own failures have given me. Speak to me. Tell me who You say I am, and show me what You've been refining me into through every season of my life. I'm listening. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Name God Gives

God names His people, and the names He gives often point to what He created them to do. That's the claim this section defends.

Kingdom Essentials Session 11 laid the foundation: the identity every believer shares in Christ. You belong to God; you're adopted, credited righteous, and seated with Christ. That identity is the same for every believer, and nothing in this session replaces it. Step 19 asks a narrower question: is there a particular name God speaks over *you*?

Scripture's renamings suggest there often is, and they're rarely just labels. They're assignments. "No longer will your name be Abram. Instead, your name will be Abraham because I will make you the father of a multitude of nations" (Genesis 17:5). The new name described what God was going to do through him. When Jesus first met Simon, He said, "You are Simon, the son of John. You will be

called Cephas" (John 1:42), which means *rock*. Later Jesus explained the name: "you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). The name was a job description, given before Simon had done anything to earn it.

Isaiah promised the same kind of renaming to God's people after the exile: "You will be called by a new name that the Lord himself will give you… You will no longer be called, 'Abandoned,' and your land will no longer be called 'Desolate.' Indeed, you will be called 'My Delight is in Her'" (Isaiah 62:2, 4). And Jesus Himself promises a new name to every believer who overcomes:

> *"To the one who conquers, I will give him some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and on that stone will be written a new (καινόν) name that no one can understand except the one who receives it."*
>
> **REVELATION 2:17**

WORD STUDY

καινός *kainos* G2537

> **"new"** · Revelation 2:17

Range. New. Greek has two common words for *new*, and they aren't the same. *Neos* (G3501) is new in time: young, recent. *Kainos* is new in kind. Thayer defines it as "new, i.e. as respects form; recently made, fresh, recent, unused, unworn (opposed to παλαιός old, antiquated)," and "as respects substance; of a new kind; unprecedented, novel, uncommon, unheard of." Strong's puts the difference simply: *kainos* is new "especially in freshness," while *neos* is new "with respect to age." It occurs forty-two times in the New Testament.

The sense here. A name that has never been given before: not a recycled label, but one fitted to the person who receives it. It's the same word Paul uses when he says that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a *new* creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17), and the word God uses at the end of the Bible: "Look! I am making all things *new*!" (Revelation 21:5).

Why it carries the argument. The name God gives isn't a better version of your old one. It's new in kind, as new as

the new creation you already are in Christ. And notice who understands it: “no one … except the one who receives it.” It’s personal. That’s why Step 19 asks you to listen for it yourself rather than borrow one from a list. It’s also why you don’t need anyone else to understand it before you believe it.

Source. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Strong’s Concordance via Bible Hub.

What we do flows out of who we are. A name from God is a declaration of who you are, and that gives clarity about what you’re for. That’s why Step 19 comes at the end of the Shaping section, just before your mission statement. What God calls you is often the clearest clue to what He created you to do.

“God insists on being the one who shapes our identity over all other influences. We are not who we think we are, nor are we who other people say we are. We are who God says we are. And His opinion is the [only] one that matters.”

Chris Tiegreen · Author and editor · *The One Year Hearing His Voice Devotional*, 2014

ILLUSTRATION

In August 2015 I attended an encounter where I was encouraged to listen to the Holy Spirit for a new name. The first two names I heard were *Beloved* and *Liberator*. At a November 2015 event, I heard a new name: *Herald*. What’s absolutely riveting is that at the same event, my son heard the name *Messenger* for himself. In February 2016 my daughter heard the name *Beloved* for herself. And then in May 2016, my future son-in-law heard the name *Warrior* for himself, while I received the name *Shepherd*.

It wasn’t until later that year that I shared my names with my family for the first time. The symmetry God had orchestrated between the identity of a father and his children was mind-boggling: a *Herald* and a *Messenger*, heard at the same event; a *Beloved* father and a *Beloved* daughter; a *Shepherd* and a *Warrior*.

And looking back, none of those names contradicted the rest of my story. Each one described something God had already been doing in my life, or

> something He was preparing me to step into. They gave me words for what He had been building all along.

In an actual group that worked through these steps, the name heard most often was *Beloved*: three of the nine people who answered Step 19 wrote it down. That's worth pausing on. *Beloved* is true of every believer, and yet God spoke it to each of them as if it were theirs alone, which it is. A shared truth can still be a personal word. But most of the same people heard something else alongside it, and those other names tended to point toward function. One woman heard *Graceful*, *Beloved* and *Comforter*, and when she wrote her Shaping statement a few days later, "comforter" was in it. Another, who had served for years as an advocate and teacher, had first been given a name tied to her own middle name, which means *reborn*; the second time she listened, she heard *communicator*. A man whose life had kept him on the move heard *Nomad* and *Traveler*.

Two of those nine heard their names during a class exercise, listening alongside others, as Session 2 suggested. And one woman wrote, after several days, "I've thought about this for a few days and honestly don't know." Her coach's answer was simple: "I just don't want you to believe He doesn't have something for you. Keep listening!"

PAUSE & REFLECT

What names have other people, or your own failures, given you? Which of them has God never said about you?

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn't "God gave me a new name" dangerously subjective?

This objection comes from careful believers, and it deserves a full hearing. *Anyone can claim God gave them a name. It sounds humble, but it can't be checked, and it's easy to hear exactly what you want: "Apostle," "Prophet," "General." Revelation 2:17 is about the reward of those who overcome, given at the end, not a name you receive in a prayer exercise. And Scripture already tells me who I am in Christ. Why go looking for anything more?*

Much of that should be conceded. Revelation 2:17 is a promise to "the one who conquers," and its full fulfillment is future. People do hear what they want to hear, and a "name from God" can become a platform for ego. And Scripture's shared identity for every believer, the one Essentials 11 taught, is the foundation. Nothing personal can replace it.

Here's where I land, and why. I believe God still speaks personally to His children, as He did to Abram, Jacob and Simon, and that a name He speaks now is a foretaste of the one He'll give in full. But I also believe such a name has to be tested like any other word you hear. Here are the tests I'd apply:

- **Does it agree with the identity Scripture gives every believer?** A name that contradicts Essentials 11, that makes you more than a child of God or less, isn't from Him.
- **Does it describe what God has already been doing?** Look back at Steps 13–18. A true name usually explains your story rather than contradicting it.
- **Does it humble you, or inflate you?** Jacob got his name the night he was forced to admit his old one, and he walked away limping.
- **Do your witnesses recognize it?** Ask the person who knows you best whether the name fits.
- **Can you hold it quietly?** "No one can understand except the one who receives it." A name from God doesn't need to be announced to be true.

Two people in an actual group that worked through these steps showed what holding a name carefully looks like. One woman heard *Hannah*, then went and looked it up: "it's a Hebrew name meaning grace, favor…" One man heard three names. He looked up the meanings of the first two, and of the third, *Great*, he wrote only: "I need further understanding on this." That's the right posture for a name you're not sure of yet: write it down, don't build on it, and keep asking.

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That you need a new name to be secure in Christ. Your identity is settled by what He did, not by what you hear.
- That a name from God is a title to claim or a rank to announce.
- That every word that surfaces in prayer is a name from God.

WHAT I AM SAYING

- That God has always named His people, and the names He gives often point to their assignment.

- That a name you sense from Him should be tested by Scripture, by your story and by your witnesses, then held with humility.

Where this stays unresolved. Nobody knows for certain what the "white stone" of Revelation 2:17 was. The Greek word, *psēphos*, means a small pebble, and it was used for voting (Acts 26:10) and for admission tokens; commentators have suggested a juror's vote of acquittal, a ticket to a feast, and other options. Scripture also doesn't say whether the new name is given only at the end or can be glimpsed now. What's clear is that the name is God's gift, personal to the one who receives it, and fitted to a new creation.

The Refiner's Fire

Everything you wrote in the Shaping section, your milestones, influencers, fields, victories, failures and promises, was God's refining work. Step 20 asks you to name what it produced.

Zechariah describes God refining a remnant of His people:

> *"Then I will bring the remaining third into the fire; I will refine (וּצְרַפְתִּים) them like silver is refined and will test them like gold is tested. They will call on my name and I will answer; I will say, 'These are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is my God.'"*
>
> **ZECHARIAH 13:9**

WORD STUDY

צָרַף *ṣārap* H6884

> **"refine"** · Zechariah 13:9

Range. To smelt, refine or test. Strong's defines it as "to fuse (metal), i.e. refine (literally or figuratively)." Brown-Driver-Briggs gives four senses: to smelt or refine metal; to test people, as Gideon's warriors were tested at the water (Judges 7:4); to test and prove true, as God's words are "refined" (Psalm 12:6; Proverbs 30:5); and, as a participle, a smelter or refiner, a goldsmith. It occurs thirty-three times in the Hebrew Bible.

The sense here. Metal-refining: heating silver until the impurities separate and can be skimmed away. In Zechariah 13:9 the verb appears twice in a row: literally, "I will *refine* them as one *refines* silver."

Why it carries the argument. Refining isn't punishment. It's what a smith does to metal he intends to use. Malachi pictures the Lord at work over the fire; the Hebrew says He "will *sit* as one refining and purifying silver" (Malachi 3:3, where the NET has "act like a refiner"). A refiner doesn't walk away from the furnace. And look at the result in Zechariah: not a destroyed people but a closer one: "They will call on my name and I will answer." The fire in your story, including the hardest parts of Session 10, was never meant to consume you. It was meant to make you pure enough to use, and near enough to hear.

Source. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

Peter, who knew something about fire, wrote that trials "show the proven character of your faith, which is much more valuable than gold – gold that is tested by fire, even though it is passing away" (1 Peter 1:7). The refining isn't finished; it won't be until the day you see Him. But it has produced something already, and Step 20 asks you to name it.

J. Robert Clinton, summing up the early phases of a leader's development, quoted Warren Wiersbe:

"God makes a worker; then he uses that worker to make a work."

Warren W. Wiersbe, as quoted by J. Robert Clinton · *The Making of a Leader*, 1988

The Shaping section has been about the making of the worker. Clinton observed that over a lifetime, God's work *in* a person and His work *through* that person spiral closer together, until the result is "a fusion of being and doing." Your Shaping statement names the worker God has been making.

In the picture you've been drawing since Session 1, your design supplied the colors and your heart their intensity. Your shaping is the lines: the path your life has actually taken, dot by dot, including the stray lines God has worked in. Step 20 asks you to step back and describe the shape those lines have made.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Looking back over Steps 13–18, what's the one thing the fire has burned away most, and the one thing it has left shining?

Naming Your Shaping

Step 20 asks you to gather Steps 13–19 into one statement, the third of the course's three summary statements. It works the same way your Design and Affinity statements did.

Your Design statement described *what* you're built to do. Your Affinity statement named *for whom* and *where*. Your Shaping statement names *what your life has prepared you for*: what the milestones, influencers, fields, victories, failures, promises and name have produced in you. It usually begins, *"I've been shaped to…"*

If you've made it this far, you've done something most people don't. In an actual group that worked through these steps, twenty people began; eight wrote a Shaping statement. The strongest of those statements were short and drew a straight line from the fire to the assignment. "I have been grown and pruned in the knowledge of Kingdom identity and the choice to reject the world's labels," one man wrote, "that I might encourage and support those around me in pain and bondage." One woman wrote that what God had brought her through had "resulted in a particular love for the underdog." The most common miss was a

list: one sentence for each step, in order, with nothing to show what they added up to. The second most common was a summary written by an AI and kept unchanged. Their coach's reply to one of those is worth remembering: "It's your journey. Not mine (nor AI's!)."

CONSIDER THIS

If you've kept your Purpose Journal electronically, an AI tool (Claude, ChatGPT or similar) can help you see the pattern across the Shaping section. Copy your answers to Steps 13–19 and paste them in after this prompt:

"I'm working through a discipleship course on discovering my God-given purpose. Below are my answers to seven steps about how God has shaped me: my most formative experiences, the people who influenced me most, the fields where I carry spiritual authority, my victories, my trials and failures, the promises God has spoken over me, and the name I sense He has given me. Please (1) point out themes, lessons and kinds of preparation that repeat across the seven answers; (2) note anything that seems to point in a different direction; and (3) offer three different drafts of a Shaping statement of 50 words or less, each beginning 'I've been shaped to…'. Describe what my life has prepared me for, not my abilities or my passions, which I've described separately. Don't flatter me. If the evidence for something is thin, say so."

As before, write your own draft first, and treat what comes back as a mirror, not a witness. Take one draft, or none, and rewrite it until it sounds like you. If a sentence still says "you" or "your," it isn't yours yet.

PAUSE & REFLECT

If someone who'd read your whole Shaping section summed up your life in one sentence, what do you think they'd say you've been prepared for?

The Turn

Everything above has been explanation. God names His people, and the names He gives often point to what He created them to do: Abraham, a father of nations; Peter, a rock. The name He promises is *kainos*, new in kind, personal to the one who receives it, and it should be tested like any other word you hear. And every season in your Shaping section was the refiner's fire: not punishment, but the work of a Refiner who sits by the furnace until the silver is pure enough to use.

Now you listen for your name, and then you name your shaping.

The Experience · Listening for Your Name

Find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted for twenty minutes. Read Isaiah 62:2–4 and Revelation 2:17 slowly. Then pray, out loud if you can: *Holy Spirit, what name do You speak over me?*

Wait. Note the very first word or words that come to mind, and write them down without editing them. If nothing comes, that's fine; write "nothing yet," and try again another day. If something comes, ask a second question: *Does this resonate with what I've been sensing my purpose to be?* Then set it aside and test it tomorrow, using the tests in this session's *What About*.

DISCOVERY STEPS · STEPS 19 AND 20

Use the Listening Rhythm for each step: *ask to be searched; do the work; sit with it; test it with the witnesses; sleep on it.*

STEP 19 · MY IDENTITY

The prompt. *What name or names has God spoken over you?*

What to do. Start with The Experience. Write down every word that has surfaced, and any names others have spoken over you in prayer (look back at your Step 18 promises). Then test each one: Does it agree with the identity every believer shares in Christ? Does it explain your Steps 13–18? Does it humble you? Does your witness recognize it? For each name that passes, write one sentence on what it tells you about your purpose.

What to produce. One to three names you sense God has spoken over you, each with a sentence on how it passed the tests and what it tells you about your purpose. If nothing has come yet, write that honestly, and write down the name you know is true of every believer that means the most to you right now.

Surface answer: *"Child of God."* (Wonderfully true of every believer, and worth holding onto. But Step 19 asks whether God has said something particular to you.) A real list from an actual group shows the same thing more gently: *"Beloved · Victorious warrior · Daughter · Treasure · Chosen · Precious in His sight."* Every word is true, and most of them are true of every believer. If one stands out from the rest, like *Victorious warrior* here, ask whether that's the particular one.

Deep answer: *"'Builder.' It came the first morning I prayed The Experience, and it hasn't left. It explains a lot: my milestones are nearly all things I started from nothing, including a youth program and my business. My wife laughed when I told her, because she's called me that for years. What it tells me about my purpose: I'm meant to start things, not just maintain them."*

Worked examples.

- *Dave (the author):* Beloved · Liberator · Herald · Shepherd.
- *Dave's family:* Messenger (his son) · Beloved (his daughter) · Warrior (his son-in-law).
- *Participant A:* Chosen son · Masterpiece · Loved.
- *Other participants:* Graceful · Beloved · Comforter. · *Hannah*, looked up afterward ("a Hebrew name meaning grace, favor…"). · First a name tied to her middle name, meaning *reborn*; then, the second time she listened, *communicator*.
- *Another,* not yet: "I've thought about this for a few days and honestly don't know." (That's an honest Step 19. Keep listening.)

You're done when …

- [ ] You've done The Experience at least once, and written down what came without editing it.
- [ ] You've tested each name with the five questions in the *What About*.
- [ ] Each name that passed has a sentence on what it tells you about your purpose.
- [ ] Your witness has heard your name and said whether it fits.
- [ ] If nothing has come yet, you've written that honestly and scheduled another time to listen.

Time: at least two days: one to listen, and at least one to test.

STEP 20 · MY SHAPING

The prompt. *Summarize your responses to Steps 13–19 into a cohesive statement of your Shaping.*

What to do. Reread Steps 13–19 in one sitting. Underline every lesson, kind of preparation or theme that shows up in more than one step. Ask: *What has my life prepared me for?* Draft three versions of a statement beginning *"I've been shaped to…"*. If you like, use the AI prompt in *Consider This* above, then rewrite in your own words. Leave out your abilities and your passions; your Design and Affinity statements already cover them. Read your best draft to your witness and ask, *"Does my life back this up?"*

What to produce. One statement, 50 words or less, beginning *"I've been shaped to…"*.

Surface answer: *"I've been shaped by many experiences to serve God."* (True of everyone who's lived long enough to read this.) The other common surface answer is a list: one sentence for each of Steps 13–19, in order. That's a table of contents, not a summary. Ask what the seven sentences add up to.

Deep answer: *“I’ve been shaped to walk with people through loss, because I’ve survived my own, and to lead quietly, because the people who shaped me most led that way. God has taught me that failure isn’t final, and I’ve been prepared to say so to people who believe it is.”*

Worked examples.

- “I’ve been refined to learn, prepare and teach truth.”
- “I’ve been shaped to engage with strangers, listen to their stories, and point them to a Savior.”
- *Other participants:* “I have been grown and pruned in the knowledge of Kingdom identity and the choice to reject the world’s labels, that I might encourage and support those around me in pain and bondage.” · “Bring comfort and grace to others — using empathy gained through hardship to support, encourage, and walk alongside those who are hurting.” (Notice the name from her Step 19, *Comforter*, carried straight into her Shaping.)

You’re done when …

- [ ] Your statement is 50 words or fewer and begins “I’ve been shaped to…”.
- [ ] You can trace it back to at least three of Steps 13–19, including at least one failure or trial.
- [ ] It describes what your life has prepared you for, not your abilities or your passions.
- [ ] Your witness read it and said, in effect, “Your life backs that up.”
- [ ] You slept on it, reread it, and it still rings true.
- [ ] If you used an AI tool, every sentence is now in your own words.

Time: at least two days. This is the last of the three summary statements. The next session puts all three together.

BIG IDEAS

1. God names His people, and the names often point to their assignment: Abraham, “father of a multitude of nations”; Peter, the rock (Genesis 17:5; Matthew 16:18).
2. Your shared identity in Christ is the foundation (Essentials 11). A particular name from God builds on it and never replaces it.
3. The new name God gives is *kainos*, new in kind, and personal to the one who receives it (Revelation 2:17). Test it, then hold it with humility.
4. Your whole story has been the refiner’s fire (*ṣārap*): not punishment, but the work of a Refiner who stays at the furnace (Zechariah 13:9; Malachi 3:3).
5. “God makes a worker; then he uses that worker to make a work.” Your Shaping statement names the worker He’s been making.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You don’t name yourself. God names you, and He refines you to fit the name.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for every name You’ve spoken over me, and for the name You’ll give me in full one day. I let go of every old label that isn’t Yours. Thank You for the fire, even the parts I wouldn’t have chosen, because You stayed at the furnace the whole time.

Keep refining me until I'm the person You've named. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Chris Tiegreen, *The One Year Hearing His Voice Devotional* (2014).
Daily readings on recognizing God's voice, including what He says about who you are.

SUBSTANTIAL

Warren W. Wiersbe, *On Being a Servant of God* (1993).
Short chapters on God's making of the worker before the work, from the writer Clinton quotes in this session.

ACADEMIC

G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (1999).
A thorough treatment of Revelation 2:17's white stone and new name, weighing the main interpretations.

LEADING THIS SESSION

Two kinds of people will struggle with Step 19: those who are skeptical of hearing anything from God, and those who hear a grand title too quickly. Honor the first group by reading the *What About* together and reminding them that "nothing yet" is an honest answer. Serve the second group with the tests, especially "Does it humble you?" The most powerful moment is often when someone shares a name and the group recognizes it before the person finishes explaining. Keep old labels private unless someone volunteers them. Group questions: *What name have you let define you that God never gave you?* and *What has your life prepared you for?* In an actual group that worked through these steps, two of the people who heard names did so during the class exercise, so give the group time to listen together in silence before anyone shares. Expect *Beloved* to come up often; honor it as a personal word, then ask whether God said anything alongside it. At Step 20, the most common misses were a sentence-per-step list and an unedited AI summary. By this point in that group, fewer than half were still going, so reach out to anyone who has dropped away and invite them back to the step where they stopped.

> If you have questions or comments about this content, or about your personal situation, email us at feedback@thedisciplespath.com.

Next: Session 12, *Your Purpose*, brings your Design, Affinity and Shaping statements together into one sentence: your mission statement, in fifty words or less.

SESSION 11 · KINGDOM PURPOSE

Your Name

Who does God say you are, and what has He been refining you into?



God names His people, and the names point to their assignment. The new name is new in kind, and personal.

Genesis 32:28
Revelation 2:17

Your whole story has been refining, by a Refiner who stays at the furnace.

Zechariah 13:9
Malachi 3:3

What has your life prepared you for? Name the worker God has been making.

1 Peter 1:7
Isaiah 62:2

SO · NOW

SO

You don't name yourself. God names you, and He refines you to fit the name.

NOW

Listen for your name, then complete Step 19 (your identity) and Step 20 (your Shaping statement).

Discovery Steps · Steps 19 and 20

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

You don’t name yourself. God names you, and He refines you to fit the name.

© thedisciplespath.com

12

YOUR PURPOSE

Kingdom Purpose: Convergence

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Made for Good Works

03 Losing Your Life to Find It

04 Writing Your Statement

05 Step Back from the Page

06 A Tool, Not a Plaque

07 The Turn

08 The Experience · Three Statements, One Page

The Question

Early in His ministry, Jesus came home to Nazareth and went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, “as was his custom” (Luke 4:16). The attendant handed Him the scroll of Isaiah. He unrolled it, found the place He was looking for, and read:

> *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*
>
> **LUKE 4:18–19**

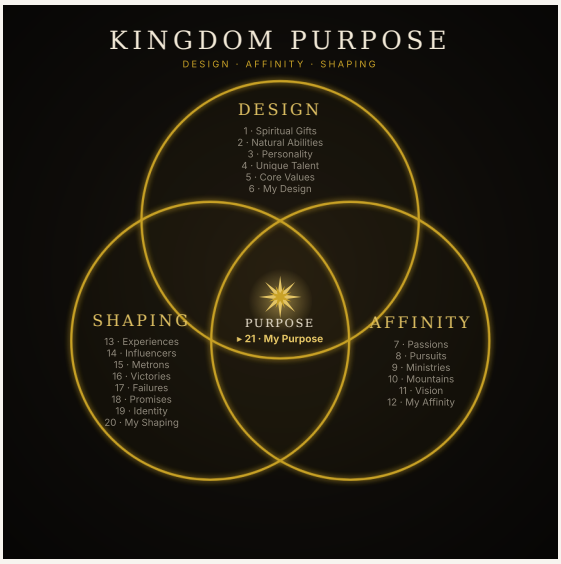
Then He rolled up the scroll, handed it back and sat down, and “the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him.” His first words were a claim: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled even as you heard it being read” (4:20–21).

It was, in effect, a mission statement: who had sent Him, what He was anointed for, and for whom. And for the next three years His life matched it, line by line: the poor heard good news, captives were freed, blind men saw. On the night before He died, He could pray, “I glorified you on earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4).

You've spent weeks on your design, your heart and your story. Now it's time to put them into one sentence.

So the question is:

In fifty words or less, what did God make you for?



You are here: Purpose · Step 21, where all three circles meet.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You prepared good works for me before I was born, and You've been shaping me for them my whole life. Now help me say it. Give me words for what You made me for, words that are true, that need You, and that I can live by every day. Let my purpose statement be Yours before it's mine. In Jesus' name, amen.

Made for Good Works

You were saved by grace, not by your works, and you were saved *for* works that God prepared for you in advance. Your mission statement is your best attempt to name them.

Kingdom Essentials Session 8 studied one word in Ephesians 2:10: *poiēma*, God's "workmanship." This session looks at the word that follows it:

> *"For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works* (ἔργοις) *that God prepared beforehand so we may do them."*
>
> **EPHESIANS 2:8–10**

WORD STUDY

ἔργον *ergon* G2041

"works" · Ephesians 2:10

Range. Work, deed, act; also business, occupation, and the product of someone's labor. Strong's defines it as "toil (as an effort or occupation); by implication, an act." Thayer gives three main senses: a business or employment, "that which occupies one's attention"; "any product accomplished by hand, art, industry, or mind"; and "an act, deed, thing done." It's one of the most common nouns in the New Testament, occurring about 174 times.

The sense here. Specific deeds God has prepared in advance for His people to do. The verb that follows, *proetoimazō* (G4282), means to prepare ahead of time. And the Greek closes the verse with *peripatēsōmen*: literally, "that we should *walk* in them." The NET's "so we may do them" is accurate; the Greek adds the picture of a path.

Why it carries the argument. The same word appears one verse earlier: salvation is "not from *works*" (2:9). Then Paul turns around and says we were created "for good *works*" (2:10). Works can't save you, and you weren't saved to sit still. Jesus used the same word when He said He had completed "the *work* you gave me to do" (John 17:4), and Paul used it again when he promised that "the one who began a good *work* in you will perfect it" (Philippians 1:6).

Your mission statement is an attempt to name the *erga* God has prepared for you, the path He means you to walk. In the language of this course, they're the dots He numbered before you picked up the pencil.

Source. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

Those good works aren't random. They're your part of the oldest assignment in Scripture. God's first words to humanity were a mission statement for the whole race: "Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it!" (Genesis 1:28). Kingdom Essentials Session 1 called it the Garden Mandate, and it has never been withdrawn. Your personal mission is the particular piece of that mandate God has prepared for you: the corner of the earth, the people and the kind of fruitfulness He built you for.

PAUSE & REFLECT

If God prepared good works for you before you were born, which of them do you think you've already been walking in?

Losing Your Life to Find It

A Kingdom mission statement isn't a plan for self-fulfillment. It's what's left when you give your life to Jesus and He gives it back with a purpose attached.

Jesus was blunt about this: "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life because of me will find it" (Matthew 10:38–39). And again: "unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it produces much grain… If anyone wants to serve me, he must follow me, and where I am, my servant will be too. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:24, 26).

That's the paradox at the heart of Step 21. Your mission statement describes *you*: your design, your heart, your story. But it isn't *for* you. It's the shape your life takes when you've laid it down. The kernel that dies produces much grain. And the servant who follows Jesus ends up where He is, honored by the Father.

We can drift through life, the victims of luck and circumstance, or chase our own agendas and desires. Or we can discover the purpose our Father determined before He created us and commit our lives and resources to it.

Nothing can satisfy a man or woman of God more than

discovering and fulfilling the **PURPOSE** of God,

planned by the **MIND** of God,

designed by the **HAND** of God,

to accomplish the **MISSION** of God,

to the GLORY of God.

> WHAT I AM NOT SAYING
>
> - That your mission statement earns you anything with God. You were saved by grace, before you wrote a word.
> - That a mission statement makes you more valuable than a believer who never writes one.
>
> WHAT I AM SAYING
>
> - That God prepared specific good works for you, and it honors Him to name them as clearly as you can.
> - That a Kingdom mission is found by losing your life to Jesus, not by building it for yourself.

Writing Your Statement

Your mission statement brings your three summary statements together into one sentence of fifty words or less. It usually begins, *"My mission is to…"*

Think of the three statements you've already written as three circles. Your **Design** statement (Step 6) says what you're built to do. Your **Affinity** statement (Step 12) says for whom and where. Your **Shaping** statement (Step 20) says what your life has prepared you for. Your mission lives where the three overlap, the place Session 1 called the intersection of your hands, your heart and your history.

Here's mine:

> *"My mission is to know God intimately, and to make Him known by writing and delivering the most effective discipleship content ever created."*
>
> Dave Wessels · Author of this course

I know how that sounds. It's a bold, aspirational statement, and it embarrasses me a little to read it to someone. That's the point. Here are the tests I'd put any mission statement through:

- **Does it embarrass you a bit?** If your purpose statement doesn't embarrass you a little when you read it to someone else, it's too small.
- **Does it require God?** If it sounds achievable with your own strength and ingenuity, you don't need God, and that's not acceptable. Session 7 made the same point about your vision. Remember Jesus' mission statement in Luke 4:18–19, the one that opened this session: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me." Jesus required the Holy Spirit to fulfill His mission. Yours will require Him too.
- **Does it make you desperate to know Him?** If it doesn't drive you toward intimacy with God, it isn't complete. That's why mine begins with *knowing* Him before *making Him known*.
- **Does it resonate with your spirit?** When you read it, your reaction should be something like, *Yes. That's who I am, and that's what I was created to do.* Session 1 called this being "drawn up out of deep water" (Proverbs 20:5).
- **Do the people who know you best affirm it?** Read it to your witness. Watch their face.
- **Does it fit your three statements?** You should be able to point to words from your Design, Affinity and Shaping statements inside it.
- **Is it unique to you?** Could it fit a thousand other people? If it could, it isn't finished.

> **ILLUSTRATION**
>
> In an actual group that worked through these steps, twenty people began and seven wrote a mission statement. Watching how those seven got there is the best guide I know to this step.

One woman's first draft had three parts. Her coach wrote back: "#1 could and should be said by every Christian. #2 and #3 focus on the idea of hope. I want you to look back at all of your responses to all of the prompts and synthesize them into a single statement that is unique to you." Her final statement named exactly who she was for: "My mission is to walk with hurting women, to offer hope and compassion and to listen to them all the while pointing them to Christ."

One man's draft was already strong, and the coach pushed him to narrow it: "Is there an area of focus regarding bondage? Is it identity issues? past trauma? anything specific?" His final statement named it: "believers in bondage to the enemy's lies about identity and authority."

Two women were offered an AI-drafted version alongside their own. One read both and kept hers: "I LOVE MINE but REALLY appreciate seeing the ChatGPT version." The other read both "over and over," as the coach suggested, chose the AI's draft, and marked it in her journal: "I like this one better." Both were right, because both chose the one that resonated in their spirit, and both could say why. And one woman, finishing after years of wondering, added a single line under her statement: "It's been a LONG time coming (to know with surety)."

CONSIDER THIS

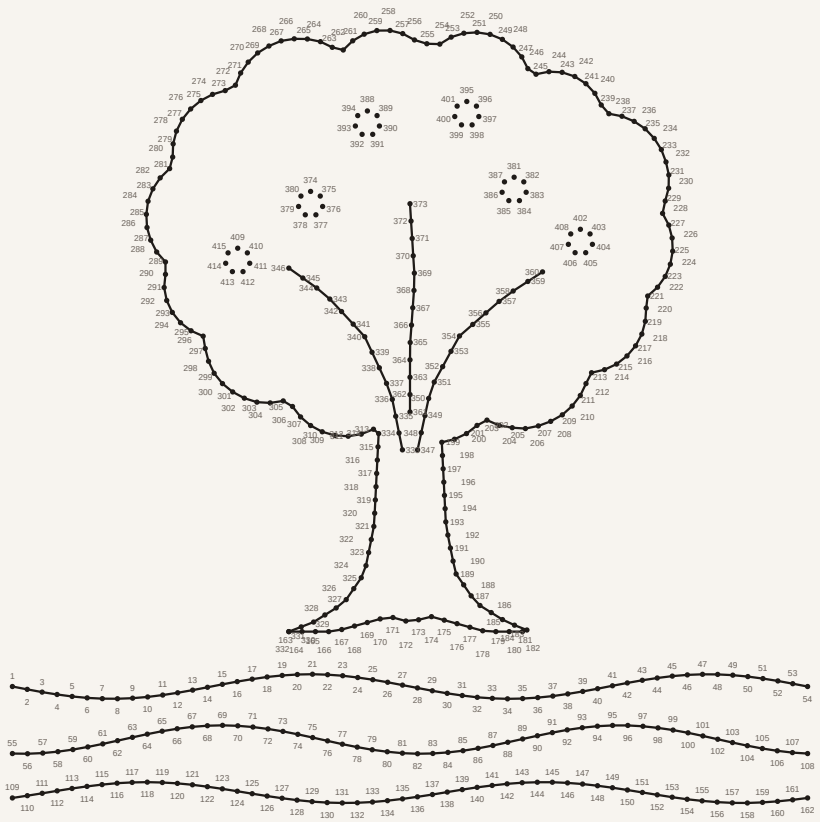
If you've kept your Purpose Journal electronically, an AI tool (Claude, ChatGPT or similar) can help you draft. Copy your three summary statements (Steps 6, 12 and 20), and paste them in after this prompt. You may also include your vision (Step 11) and your name (Step 19).

"I'm working through a discipleship course on discovering my God-given purpose. Below are three statements I've written: my Design (what I'm built to do), my Affinity (for whom and where I'm called), and my Shaping (what my life has prepared me for), plus my vision and the name I sense God has spoken over me. Please offer five different drafts of a mission statement of 50 words or less, each beginning 'My mission is to…'. Each draft should clearly include something from all three statements. Make at least two of them bold enough that they would require God's help to accomplish. Then tell me which words appear in all three of my statements. Don't flatter me."

As always, write your own draft first, and treat what comes back as a mirror, not a witness. The final statement has to be yours, prayed over and tested. An AI can help you find words; it can't tell you whether they're true. If you're torn between your draft and an AI's, do what one coach told a student: read both "over and over and determine which one (or edit as you see fit) resonates deeply with your soul."

Step Back from the Page

In Session 1 you saw forty-five dots of a picture and couldn't tell what it was. In Session 8 you saw more than half, and may have started to guess. Here it is now:



Dot 373 of 415. Step back far enough and you can see what the picture is, even though the last details are still only dots. There are forty-two dots left. The next session connects them.

You can see what it is now. The fruit isn't finished, and there's detail still to come, but nobody looking at this page would mistake it for anything else. That's what writing your mission statement is like. You still don't know every dot of your future. But you've connected enough of them, and stepped back far enough, to name what the picture is.

A Tool, Not a Plaque

Your mission statement isn't meant to be framed and forgotten. It's a tool you can use every day to make decisions, reset your emotions, and remember who you are.

To make decisions. When an opportunity comes, ask, *Does this serve my mission?* A clear mission makes it easier to say yes to the right things and no to good things that aren't yours. Clinton observed that for maturing leaders, "learning what not to do is as important as learning what to do."

To reset your emotions. When you're discouraged, criticized or overwhelmed, read your statement aloud. It reminds you that your worth isn't on the line in today's setback, and that God has a purpose that's bigger than this week.

To remember who you are. Put it where you'll see it: the first page of your journal, your phone's lock screen, the mirror. Read it before you start work. Pray it back to God.

One woman in an actual group that worked through these steps did all three in a single message. Her statement, she wrote, "resonates to my soul. It definitely describes me so I printed it out and will hang it on my wall." Then, in the very next sentence: "Now I need to figure out how to do this at my job." That second sentence is what turns a plaque into a tool. Session 13 takes it from there.

WHAT ABOUT …

What if my statement changes in five years?

Some readers will hesitate to write anything final, and the hesitation is reasonable. *I'm going to change. My life will change. Five years from now I might be in a different job, a different city, a different season. Writing a mission statement now feels like setting in concrete something God may not be finished revealing. What if I get it wrong?*

Much of that is simply true. You will change, and God isn't finished revealing His purpose to you. This whole course has insisted that purpose is revealed dot by dot, not downloaded all at once. Clinton found that most leaders go through distinct phases, and that only in the last one, which he called *convergence*, does a leader's role finally match their "gift-mix, experience, temperament, and so on." He also observed that "not many leaders experience convergence." Your statement at thirty and your statement at sixty may not read the same.

Here's where I land, and why. I believe the core of a true mission statement rarely changes, while its expression often does. Paul is the clearest example I know.

I'd argue that Paul was the same man after the Damascus road as he was before it. Before, he was a zealot for his God, all in. "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my nation," he wrote, "and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors" (Galatians 1:14). He told a Jerusalem crowd that he had been "zealous for God just as all of you are today" (Acts 22:3). What changed on the road wasn't his design or his passion. It was his understanding of who God is. His first words to the risen Christ were a question: "Who are you, Lord?" And the answer turned his world upside down: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting!" (Acts 9:5).

The zeal that had driven him to persecute the church was sin, and he never pretended otherwise (Galatians 1:13). But the man was the same: the same mind, the same drive, the same all-in devotion. And Paul himself said that God had "set me apart from birth" (Galatians 1:15), long before he knew Jesus. What followed Damascus was reshaping: blindness, years of obscurity, and the slow redirection

of everything God had built into him. His calling was stated within days: he was God's "chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). The *where* and *how* changed many times, from Damascus to Antioch to Rome, but the *what* never did.

That's why I don't think you need to fear change. If your statement changes in five years, it will most likely be because God has sharpened it, not because He has thrown it away. You'll be the same person, with the same design and the same heart, understanding God a little better and reshaped a little more.

So write the best statement you can today, and date it. Then revisit it once a year. You'll be surprised how often the core holds.

> WHAT I AM NOT SAYING
>
> - That your statement is fixed forever, or that revising it means you got it wrong.
> - That you should wait until you're sure before you write anything down.
>
> WHAT I AM SAYING
>
> - That the core of a true mission usually holds while its expression grows.
> - That a dated, written statement is something God can sharpen. An unwritten one is only a feeling.

The Turn

Everything above has been explanation. You weren't saved by good works, but you were saved for them, and God prepared them in advance for you to walk in. Your mission is your piece of the Garden Mandate, found by losing your life to Jesus, not by building it for yourself. A true mission statement embarrasses you a little, requires God, drives you toward Him, resonates with your spirit and is recognized by the people who know you. And it's a tool for every day, not a plaque for the wall.

Now you write it.

The Experience · Three Statements, One Page

Take a fresh page. Near the top, write your Design statement. Below it, your Affinity statement. Below that, your Shaping statement. Leave the bottom third of the page blank.

Now read the three slowly, out loud. Circle every word or idea that appears in more than one statement. Underline the single most important word in each. Then look at what you've marked, and ask the Holy Spirit, *What sentence holds all of this?* Write whatever comes in the blank space at the bottom, without polishing it. That's your first draft.

Then find the paragraph you wrote at the beginning of Session 1, your first guess at your purpose. Put it beside your draft. Notice what has changed, and what hasn't.

DISCOVERY STEP · STEP 21

Use the Listening Rhythm: *ask to be searched; do the work; sit with it; test it with the witnesses; sleep on it.* This step deserves all five, more than once.

STEP 21 · MY PURPOSE

The prompt. *In 50 words or less, write a mission statement that encapsulates your Design (Step 6), your Affinity (Step 12) and your Shaping (Step 20).*

What to do. Start with The Experience. Write at least three drafts, each beginning *"My mission is to…"*. If you like, use the AI prompt in *Consider This*, then rewrite in your own words. Put your best draft through the seven tests in *Writing Your Statement*. Read it aloud to your witness and ask two questions: *"Is this me?"* and *"Is it big enough?"* Sleep on it at least two nights. Then compare it with the paragraph you wrote in Session 1, and write one sentence about what God has shown you between the two.

What to produce. One mission statement, 50 words or less, beginning "My mission is to…", dated. Beneath it, one sentence comparing it with your Session 1 paragraph.

Surface answer: *"My mission is to serve God and help others."* (Every believer's mission, in words that could belong to anyone and need no one's help to accomplish.) A real near miss from an actual group: *"I believe God created me to love and encourage others, using my life experiences… to shape my faith and compassion."* Her coach's question was the right one: "Is this statement unique to you, or could it fit a thousand other people?"

Deep answer: *"My mission is to know Jesus deeply and to build communities where young adults who have walked away from faith find their way home: listening to their stories, teaching Scripture in plain language, and walking with them until they lead others. Only God can do this through me."*

Worked examples.

- *Dave (the author):* "My mission is to know God intimately, and to make Him known by writing and delivering the most effective discipleship content ever created."
- *Participant A:* "To disciple believers in faithful stewardship and Kingdom life, empowering them to navigate adversity faithfully and catalyze the accomplishment of their significant, God-given goals."
- *Other participants:* "My mission is to help believers in bondage to the enemy's lies about identity and authority find freedom and to support Kingdom growth through exceptional creative and strategic technological solutions." · "My mission is to walk with hurting women, to offer hope and compassion and to listen to them all the while pointing them to Christ. Through my testimony and service, I show them that they are seen and valued, and that they can find love, peace, joy, restoration and fulfillment in Christ." · "Always striving for excellence with deep compassion, it is my mission to serve God as a

communicator, advocate, and teacher; always seeking His face and His will, to notice the needs of others and come alongside them with a high level of skill, love, strength, and integrity."

You're done when …

- [ ] Your statement is 50 words or fewer and begins "My mission is to…" (or an equivalent form that works for you).
- [ ] You can point to words from your Design, Affinity and Shaping statements inside it.
- [ ] It embarrasses you a little, and it requires God.
- [ ] It makes you want to know Him more.
- [ ] When you read it aloud, something in you says, *Yes. That's what I was made for.*
- [ ] Your witness read it and affirmed it.
- [ ] You've slept on it at least twice, and you've compared it with your Session 1 paragraph.
- [ ] You've dated it, and put it somewhere you'll see it every day.

Time: at least three days. This is the payoff of the whole course. Don't rush it.

BIG IDEAS

1. You were saved "not from works" but "for good works that God prepared beforehand": literally, works to walk in (Ephesians 2:9–10).
2. Your mission is your piece of the Garden Mandate (Genesis 1:28), the particular fruitfulness God built you for.
3. A Kingdom mission is found by losing your life to Jesus, not by building it for yourself (Matthew 10:39; John 12:24–26).
4. A true mission statement embarrasses you a little, requires God, drives you toward Him, resonates with your spirit and is affirmed by the people who know you.
5. Your statement is a tool for every day: to make decisions, reset your emotions and remember who you are. Its core usually holds

while its expression grows.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God prepared good works for you before you were born; your mission is to name them, and then walk in them.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for preparing good works for me before I was born, and for shaping me all my life to walk in them. Here is my mission. I give it to You. Make it bigger than I am, so that I'll always need You. Let me use it every day, to choose well, to stand firm and to remember who I am. And one day, let me say with Jesus that I've completed the work You gave me to do. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Bob Buford, *Halftime: Moving from Success to Significance* (1994). *A businessman's account of stepping back at midlife to ask what his life was for, and of writing his own mission. Especially helpful if you're finishing this course in the second half of life.*

SUBSTANTIAL

Gordon T. Smith, *Courage and Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential* (1999; rev. ed. 2011).

A wise, pastoral guide to discerning vocation across the seasons of life, including how a calling is refined and restated over time.

ACADEMIC

Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (1991).

A theologian's case for understanding work through the gifts of the Spirit rather than a single lifelong "calling." Read it alongside this session's What About.

LEADING THIS SESSION

This is the session people have been waiting for, and some will arrive with a polished statement while others arrive with nothing. Make room for both. Give the group time to do The Experience together, in silence, and then invite anyone who is willing to read a first draft aloud, with no critique from the group, only the question, "What did you hear?" Watch for two opposite errors: statements so general they could belong to anyone, and statements so detailed they're job descriptions. The seven tests are your tool for both. If someone isn't ready, remind them that the pace is theirs. The coach in an actual group that worked through these steps had two moves that did most of the work: *narrow it* ("Is there an area of focus?") and *test it against a crowd* ("Could it fit a thousand other people?"). His closing question was always the same: "When you read it over and over, does it resonate? Do you find yourself saying, that's me?" Group questions: *What word appears in all three of your statements?* and *What does your statement need God for?*

> If you have questions or comments about this content, or about your personal situation, email us at feedback@thedisciplespath.com.

Next: Session 13, *Living on Purpose*, asks the question that comes after the statement: now that you know what you're for, how do you live it for the rest of your life?

SESSION 12 · KINGDOM PURPOSE

Your Purpose

In fifty words or less, what did God make you for?



Not saved by works, but for them: works God prepared for you to walk in.

Ephesians 2:8–10
Genesis 1:28

A Kingdom mission is what's left when you give your life to Jesus.

Matthew 10:39
John 12:24–26

Design, Affinity and Shaping in one sentence. Test it, date it, use it every day.

Luke 4:18–19
John 17:4

SO · NOW

SO

God prepared good works for you before you were born; your mission is to name them, and then walk in them.

NOW

Put your three statements on one page, then complete Step 21: your mission statement.

Discovery Step · Step 21

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God prepared good works for you before you were born; your mission is to name them, and then walk in them.

© thedisciplespath.com

13

LIVING ON PURPOSE

Kingdom Purpose: Commissioning

AT A GLANCE

01 The Question

02 Consecrate Yourselves

03 Little by Little

04 Telling Your God Story

05 Finishing Well

06 The Finished Picture

07 The Turn

08 The Experience · Consecration

The Question

Session 1 opened with the Eric Liddell of the movies: the sprinter on a hillside above Edinburgh, saying, “when I run I feel His pleasure.” Here is how the real Eric Liddell’s story ended.

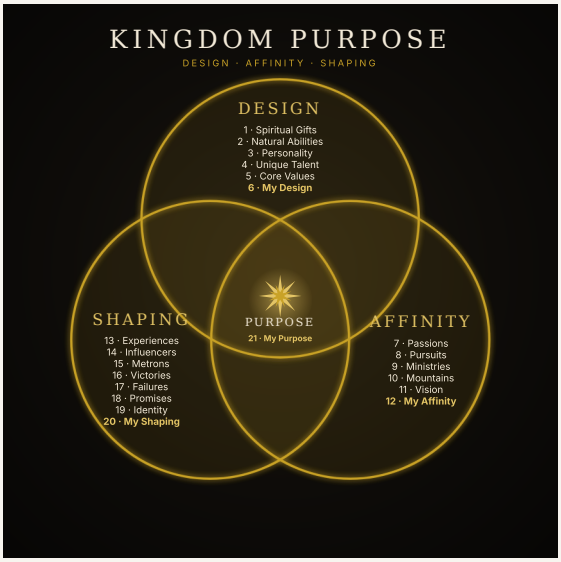
The year after he won Olympic gold in Paris, Liddell went to China as a missionary, back to the country where he’d been born. He taught mathematics and science at a school for Chinese boys in Tianjin and coached them in athletics. In 1941 he moved to a poor rural mission station to work alongside his brother, a doctor. When Japanese forces advanced, he was interned with other foreigners at the Weihsien camp, in 1943. There, though he was separated from his wife and daughters, he taught Bible classes, organized games for the camp’s restless teenagers, and poured himself into the people around him. A fellow prisoner remembered him as “absorbed, weary and interested, pouring all of himself into this effort to capture the imagination of these penned-up youths.”

He died in the camp on 21 February 1945, of a brain tumor made worse by overwork and hunger. He was forty-three. His last words, as they were reported, were “It’s complete surrender.”

The film made him famous for a race. His life is remembered for how he finished.

So the question is:

Now that you know what you’re for, how will you live it for the rest of your life?



The whole map, walked: all twenty-one steps. One final step remains: your God Story.

OPENING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, You've shown me what You made me for. Now I don't want to just know it; I want to live it, every day, for the rest of my life. Set me apart for You. Teach me to be patient with Your pace, faithful in small things and honest about what You've done. Help me finish well. It's complete surrender. In Jesus' name, amen.

Consecrate Yourselves

Living your purpose begins with consecration: setting yourself apart for God and for the assignment He has given you.

Israel spent forty years in the wilderness before they stood on the bank of the Jordan, looking at the land God had promised them. The river was at flood stage (Joshua 3:15). Before God did anything, Joshua gave the people one instruction:

> *"Ritually consecrate yourselves (הִתְקַדְּשׁוּ), for tomorrow the Lord will perform miraculous deeds among you."*
>
> **JOSHUA 3:5**

WORD STUDY

קָדַשׁ *qādaš* H6942

> **"consecrate yourselves"** · Joshua 3:5

Range. To be holy, set apart; in other forms, to consecrate, sanctify or treat as holy. Strong's defines it as "to be (causatively, make, pronounce or observe as) clean (ceremonially or morally)." It's the verb behind the whole Old Testament vocabulary of holiness, and it occurs about 175 times.

The sense here. Joshua uses the reflexive (Hithpael) form: *consecrate yourselves*. Brown-Driver-Briggs gives its senses as to "keep oneself apart" from unclean things and to "consecrate oneself by purification." In practice it meant washing, preparing and setting aside everything that didn't belong, so that the people were ready for what God was about to do.

Why it carries the argument. Notice the order. Consecration came *before* the miracle, not after it: "consecrate yourselves, *for tomorrow* the Lord will perform miraculous deeds." And the next day the priests had to step into the flooded river before the water stopped (3:13, 15–16). God didn't ask Israel to earn the Promised Land by consecrating themselves. He asked them to be ready for it. That's what this session asks of you: to set yourself apart for the mission He has shown you, before you've seen much of it fulfilled.

Source. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Strong's Concordance via Bible Hub.

The New Testament puts consecration in the language of worship: “Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice – alive, holy, and pleasing to God – which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). A *living* sacrifice isn’t offered once. It’s offered every morning. Consecrating your mission isn’t a single ceremony; it’s a decision you’ll renew for the rest of your life. But it has to start somewhere, and The Experience in this session is where it starts.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What would you need to set aside, or wash off, to be ready for what God wants to do through your mission?

Little by Little

God rarely fulfills a mission all at once. He does it little by little, because that’s how He builds the capacity to carry it.

Before Israel ever reached the Jordan, God told them how the conquest would go: “Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you become fruitful and inherit the land” (Exodus 23:30). Moses repeated it forty years later: “He, the God who leads you, will expel the nations little by little. You will not be allowed to destroy them all at once lest the wild animals overrun you” (Deuteronomy 7:22). God wasn’t being slow. He was being wise. Too much land too soon would have been more than Israel could hold.

Proverbs applies the same principle to every resource God gives: “Wealth gained quickly will dwindle away, but the one who gathers it little by little will become rich” (Proverbs 13:11). If God gave you your whole mission at once, the weight of it would crush you. So He gives it to you a field at a time, a step at a time, a dot at a time. In Session 1 you read that purpose is a crockpot, not a microwave. It’s lived the same way it was discovered.

This is why Session 9’s principle matters so much now: “The one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much” (Luke 16:10). The next step of your mission is almost always small. It may be one conversation, one class, one phone call, one prayer over your workplace. Take it. Then take the next one.

One woman in an actual group that worked through these steps found her next step in the same breath as her mission statement. She had printed it out to hang on

her wall, she wrote, and then: “Now I need to figure out how to do this at my job.” That’s exactly the right question, and it’s a little-by-little question. Nobody figures out how to live a mission at their job in a day. You figure out what it means on Monday, and then on Tuesday.

PAUSE & REFLECT

What’s the smallest next step your mission statement asks of you this week?

Telling Your God Story

What God has done for you during this course is a story worth telling, and telling it is part of living on purpose.

Kingdom Essentials Session 26 studied why testimony matters so much in Scripture: “the testimony about Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10). Psalm 78 shows what happens when God’s people stop telling their stories. The psalmist promises, “We will tell the next generation about the Lord’s praiseworthy acts, about his strength and the amazing things he has done” (78:4), so that they “will not forget the works of God” (78:7). And then he tells how Israel failed: “They forgot what he had done, the amazing things he had shown them” (78:11). “They did not remember what he had done, how he delivered them from the enemy” (78:42).

In Session 8 you set up memorial stones for the turning points in your life. This course has been one of those turning points. The psalmist wrote, literally, “I have inherited your testimonies forever, for they are the joy of my heart” (Psalm 119:111; the NET renders it, “I claim your rules as my permanent possession, for they give me joy”). The things God has said and done are an inheritance to claim, and to pass on.

Your God Story is short: two or three minutes. It has three parts:

- **The drama:** where you were when you started this course, and what you thought about your purpose then. (Your Session 1 paragraph will help. So will the places you stalled. In an actual group that worked through these steps, one man spent two years watching doors close on work he believed God had promised him, and wondered whether he’d made it up. A story like that is the drama.)

- **But God!** What He did and showed you along the way: the step that surprised you, the witness who saw something you didn't, the name, the promise, the moment something rang true. (One woman in that group put her "But God!" in a single line under her finished statement: "It's been a LONG time coming (to know with surety).")
- **Now:** your mission statement, and one thing you're going to do about it.

Then tell it to someone. Tell it to your witness, your small group, your family or a friend who doesn't yet know Jesus. A story told is a stone set up by the river, and someone will ask what it means.

Finishing Well

A purpose isn't fulfilled at the start line. It's fulfilled at the finish, and finishing well is not automatic.

J. Robert Clinton spent years studying the lives of leaders in Scripture, and he found a sobering pattern:

> *"In this research, I saw that thirteen of forty-nine Bible leaders who had data indicating their finish, finished well. That means that only one out of three or four finished well."*
>
> J. Robert Clinton · Professor of leadership, Fuller Theological Seminary · *The Making of a Leader*, 1988

Most of the leaders Scripture describes didn't finish as well as they started. That isn't a reason for fear, but it's a reason for attention. Paul, near the end of his life, could say, "I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith!" (2 Timothy 4:7). Years earlier he had told the Ephesian elders what he was aiming at: "I do not consider my life worth anything to myself, so that I may finish my task and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:24). His whole life was bent toward the finish.

You studied David's epitaph in Session 1: "David, after he had served God's purpose in his own generation, died" (Acts 13:36). That's the goal. Not fame, not a large ministry, but serving God's *boulē* in your own generation, all the way to the end. Hebrews tells us how: "we must get rid of every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and run with endurance the race set out for us, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus" (Hebrews 12:1–2).

WHAT ABOUT …

Isn’t living for rewards just a mercenary faith?

Some readers will be uncomfortable with the idea that God rewards faithfulness, and the objection is worth stating plainly. *We’re saved by grace, not by works. Shouldn’t we serve God because we love Him, not for what we’ll get? Talking about rewards turns the Christian life into a transaction: do this, get that. It sounds like the prosperity gospel with a longer time horizon.*

Much of that is right. Salvation is by grace alone, “not from works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:9). Love for God, not a payoff, is the right motive for serving Him. And some teaching on rewards really has turned faith into a transaction.

But Scripture speaks about rewards far too often to ignore them. “The one who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). Paul wrote that “each will receive his reward according to his work” (1 Corinthians 3:8), and that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Corinthians 5:10). He describes believers’ work being tested by fire: “If what someone has built survives, he will receive a reward. If someone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:14–15). Notice that last sentence. The reward is at stake, not the salvation. Grace saves; faithfulness is rewarded.

And the rewards aren’t only in eternity. Jesus promised that no one who leaves home, family or fields for His sake “will not receive in this age a hundred times as much – homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, fields, all with persecutions – and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:29–30). The purpose-filled life is rewarding now, persecutions included, and it’s rewarded later.

Here’s where I land, and why. C. S. Lewis made the distinction that helps most, in his sermon *The Weight of Glory*. A man who marries a woman for her money is mercenary, he said; a man who marries for love and wants marriage as the reward of his love is not. The reward isn’t tacked on to the activity; it’s the activity itself brought to completion. The reward for living your purpose is, finally, more of God: hearing “Well done” from the One you’ve been serving (Matthew 25:21). Wanting that isn’t mercenary. Lewis’s complaint was that we want it too little:

> *“We are far too easily pleased.”*
>
> C. S. Lewis · *The Weight of Glory*, 1941

WHAT I AM NOT SAYING

- That rewards earn or keep your salvation. You were saved by grace, and a believer whose work burns up “himself will be saved” (1 Corinthians 3:15).
- That faithfulness guarantees wealth, health or comfort in this life. Jesus’ promise includes “persecutions.”

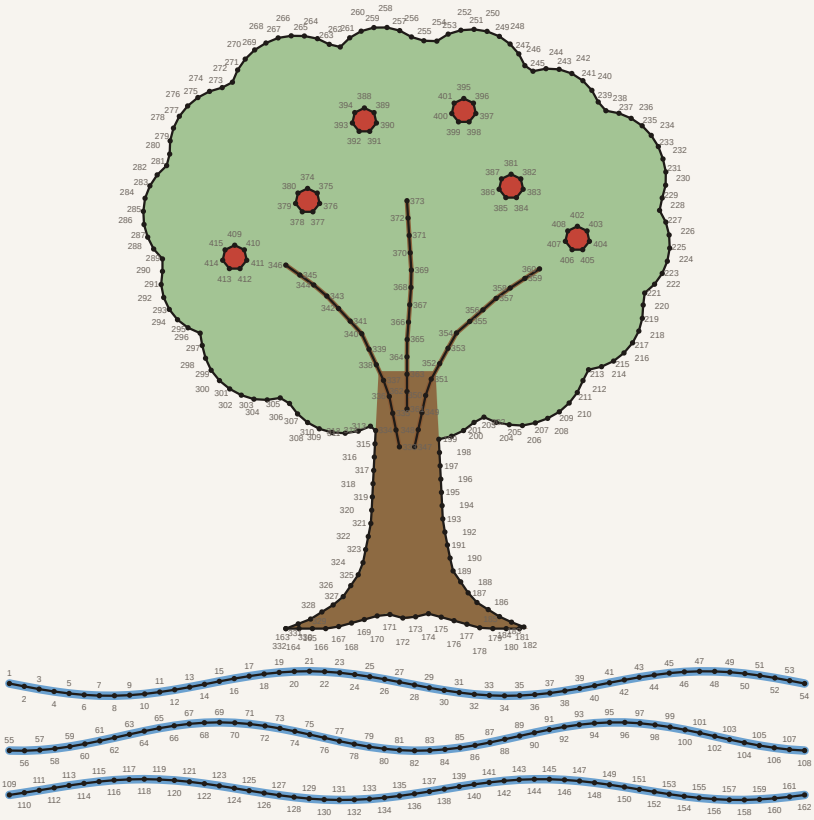
WHAT I AM SAYING

- That God rewards those who seek Him and serve Him faithfully, both in this age and in the age to come.
- That the deepest reward of a life lived on purpose is more of God Himself, and it’s right to want it.

Where this stays unresolved. Scripture describes eternal rewards mostly in images: crowns, treasure, cities, a master’s “Well done.” It doesn’t give a detailed account of what they are, and careful evangelical scholars disagree about whether there will be differing degrees of reward in eternity. What is clear is that faithfulness matters to God, that nothing done for Him is wasted, and that His “Well done” is worth everything it costs.

The Finished Picture

Here is the picture you’ve been watching since Session 1, with every dot connected, and colored in for the first time:



Dot 415 of 415. Every dot connected, and colored in for the first time: a tree planted by flowing streams, bearing its fruit. The page is finished. Your life isn't.

Now you can see it: a tree planted by streams of water, with fruit in its branches. You've read the verse this picture comes from:

> *"He is like a tree planted by flowing streams; it yields its fruit at the proper time, and its leaves never fall off. He succeeds in everything he attempts."*
>
> **PSALM 1:3**

The lines are your shaping: the path your life has taken, dot by dot, including the stray lines God worked in. The colors are your design: the "many-colored" grace of 1 Peter 4:10 and the embroidered threads of Psalm 139:15, the palette God chose for you. The intensity is your heart: where the color runs deepest. And the richest color is in the fruit, because fruit is the point. The tree is planted by the streams so that it will bear fruit "at the proper time."

One reminder from Session 5 belongs here. Deeper color marks where a picture is concentrated, not how much it's worth. The tree's roots are no less part of the picture than its fruit.

This page is finished. Your life isn't. The picture God is drawing with your life has millions of dots, and most of them are still ahead of you. But you know now

what He's drawing. Keep connecting them, one at a time, with Him. "The one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

The Turn

Everything above has been explanation. Living on purpose begins with consecration: setting yourself apart before you've seen the miracle, as Israel did at the Jordan. God fulfills your mission little by little, building the capacity to carry it. Your God Story is a memorial stone worth telling. Finishing well is the goal, and it takes attention. And God rewards faithfulness, in this age and the next, with more of Himself.

The course is finished. The journey isn't. Now you consecrate your mission, and tell your story.

The Experience · Consecration

Take the page where you wrote your mission statement. Beneath it, write a short prayer of consecration in your own words. You might include:

- thanks for what God has shown you through this course;
- your mission statement, offered back to Him;
- anything you're setting aside so that you're ready for what He wants to do;
- a request for help to finish well.

Then read it aloud, sign it, and date it.

If you can, do this with your witness, or with a pastor or a few mature believers. Ask them to pray over you and your mission. Paul reminded Timothy that his gift had been "confirmed by prophetic words when the elders laid hands on" him (1 Timothy 4:14). There's something powerful about being sent out by people who know you.

FINAL STEP · MY GOD STORY

This last step isn't about discovering anything new. It's about telling what God has done, and committing to live it.

FINAL STEP · MY GOD STORY

The prompt. *In your discovery journey, what did God do, and what did He reveal to you?*

What to do. Complete The Experience first: your written consecration, signed and dated. Then reread your Purpose Journal from the first page, including your Session 1 paragraph. Mark the three or four moments where God did or showed something that changed you. Write your God Story in three parts: *the drama* (where you started), *But God!* (what He did and revealed), and *now* (your mission statement, and one thing you'll do about it). Time yourself reading it aloud; aim for two or three minutes. Then tell it to at least one person, in person if you can.

What to produce. Your written consecration, signed and dated. Your God Story, written, two to three minutes long. And a note of who you told it to, and what happened.

Surface answer: *"I took a course, learned a lot about myself, and wrote a mission statement."* (True, but there's no drama, no "But God!" and no story anyone will remember.)

Deep answer: *"When I started this course, I'd just retired, and I honestly thought my useful years were over. My Session 1 paragraph said something like 'maybe I can help out at church.' But God! My witness told me in Step 4 that I'm the one everyone calls in a crisis. In Step 17 I finally wrote about losing my son, and I realized God had been preparing me for thirty years to sit with grieving parents. The name I heard in Step 19 was 'Comforter,' which undid me. My mission is to walk with parents through the loss of a child, and to help churches learn how. This month I'm meeting with our pastor to talk about starting a grief group."*

You're done when …

- [ ] Your consecration is written, read aloud, signed and dated.
- [ ] Someone has prayed over you and your mission, if that's possible for you.
- [ ] Your God Story has all three parts: the drama, *But God!* and now.
- [ ] It takes two to three minutes to tell.
- [ ] You've told it to at least one person.
- [ ] You've put your mission statement where you'll see it every day, and set a date one year from now to reread it.

Time: at least two days: one to write, one to tell.

BIG IDEAS

1. Living on purpose begins with consecration: setting yourself apart for God *before* you see the miracle (*qādaš*, Joshua 3:5), and renewing it every morning (Romans 12:1).
2. God fulfills a mission little by little, building the capacity to carry it (Exodus 23:30; Proverbs 13:11). Take the next small step.
3. Your God Story is a memorial stone. Tell it, so that you and others "will not forget the works of God" (Psalm 78:7).
4. Finishing well is the goal, and few do. Serve God's purpose in your generation all the way to the end (Acts 13:36; 2 Timothy 4:7).
5. God rewards faithfulness in this age and the next. The deepest reward is more of Him, and it's right to want it.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God reveals your purpose dot by dot, and He fulfills it the same way; your part is to

stay consecrated, stay faithful and keep connecting the dots until you finish.

CLOSING PRAYER (SAY THIS ALOUD!)

Father, thank You for every dot You've revealed in this course, and for every line You've drawn in my life, including the ones I didn't understand. Thank You for my design, my heart and my story. Thank You for my mission. I consecrate it to You, and I consecrate myself. Give me patience for the little-by-little, courage to tell what You've done, and grace to finish well. Make me like a tree planted by flowing streams, bearing fruit at the proper time, for Your glory. It's complete surrender. In Jesus' name, amen.

GO DEEPER

ACCESSIBLE

Eric Liddell, *The Disciplines of the Christian Life* (1985).
A short guide to daily devotion that Liddell wrote in China; published forty years after his death. The real Liddell, in his own words.

SUBSTANTIAL

C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (1941 sermon; collected 1949).
Lewis's sermon on desire, reward and glory, and the source of this session's What About. Short enough to read in one sitting.

ACADEMIC

Craig L. Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35, no. 2 (1992).
A careful New Testament scholar argues against differing degrees of eternal reward. Read it to hear the strongest case on

the other side of this session's Unresolved note.

LEADING THIS SESSION

Treat this as a celebration and a commissioning. If you can, give the final meeting to God Stories: two or three minutes each, with the group responding after each one by praying over the person and their mission. Plan the time so that everyone who wants to share can. Make room for The Experience in the group: have people read their consecration prayers aloud, and lay hands on one another and pray, as the elders did for Timothy. Some people won't have finished Step 21; honor where they are, and invite them to tell the part of their story they can. Expect that to be most of the room. In an actual group that worked through these steps, twenty began and seven wrote a mission statement. The coach's most frequent note, a dozen times over, was "Don't give up the process." Before the group disbands, offer the people who stopped a way back: a date, a partner, or a standing invitation to pick up at the step where they left off. The course doesn't expire. Group questions: *What's your "But God!" moment from this course?* and *What's your next small step?*

> If you have questions or comments about this content, or about your personal situation, email us at feedback@thedisciplespath.com.

Where to go from here: Reread your mission statement every morning for the next month, and put a date on your calendar one year from today to revisit it. If you're

reading this without having finished every step, you're in good company: most people who start this course stall somewhere. Go back to the step where you stopped and pick it up. Nothing has expired. If this course surfaced wounds that still need healing, Kingdom Essentials Session 18 is the place to begin. And consider walking someone else through this course, the way your witness walked with you.

SESSION 13 · KINGDOM PURPOSE

Living on Purpose

Now that you know what you're for, how will you live it for the rest of your life?



Set yourself apart before you see the miracle, and renew it every morning.

Joshua 3:5
Romans 12:1

God fulfills a mission step by step, building the capacity to carry it. Tell your story as you go.

Exodus 23:30
Psalm 78:4

Serve God's purpose in your generation to the end. He rewards the faithful.

2 Timothy 4:7
Psalm 1:3

SO · NOW

SO

God reveals your purpose dot by dot, and He fulfills it the same way; your part is to stay consecrated, stay faithful and keep connecting the dots until you finish.

NOW

Write and sign your consecration, then write your God Story and tell it to someone.

Final Step · My God Story

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

God reveals your purpose dot by dot, and He fulfills it the same way; your part is to stay consecrated, stay faithful and keep connecting the dots until you finish.

© thedisciplespath.com