

**Pentecost 15 / September 1, 2024**

**Psalm 138:8**

***“The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me.”***

### **Purpose in Life**

What is your purpose in life? How has your sense of purpose changed over the years? Is it the same now as it was 10, 20 or 30 years ago? What will your purpose be in 10, 20, or 30 years? When did you become aware that you had a purpose, or even needed one? Humans are the only creatures in God’s creation that think in terms of purpose. We need a reason to be, a purpose in life. When we no longer can fulfill certain roles or perform certain functions, we feel that we no longer have any purpose. People, affected by limitations on their health and mobility, lament that they no longer have any purpose in life.

We think of purpose in terms of function, a job to do, a role to fill. Retirees sometimes experience a loss of purpose; even though they spent their working years planning for retirement and imagining what they would do if they won the lottery. What does it mean that the Lord has a purpose for us? Will His purpose for us ever be fulfilled? When something fulfills its purpose it is often cast away. In one of the Toy Story movies, a group of abandoned toys languishes with a sense of purposelessness. The children who played with them have grown up and they have been cast away. We may feel that way when our children have moved away, our grandchildren have grown up and we no longer can do the things we used to enjoy and found meaning in doing.

God always has a purpose for us. His purpose is that we would receive His love. Love creates purpose and brings meaning. God’s purpose for us is that we would receive His love at every stage of life. God loved King David in his youth when he was a shepherd. He loved him in adulthood when he was a king. He loved him when he was an elderly man so feeble he couldn’t get out of bed. God loved David, despite the sins he committed as an adulterer and murderer. Love creates purpose. When we love someone, they always have purpose. When someone loves us, we always have purpose. God loves us. In His love we have purpose and find meaning at every stage in life. God’s love is expressed fully in Christ Jesus. In Him we receive His love in forgiveness, peace and eternal life.

We think of purpose on terms of function. Something has purpose only so long as it has a function in our lives. The lonely toys from Toy Story were cast aside, because they no longer had a function in their owner’s lives. No function, no purpose. The children grew up and didn’t need them anymore. God understands purpose in terms of His steadfast love that endures forever. David sings, *“I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and faithfulness.”* God’s purpose in the world, in the life of Israel, in David’s and in our lives, is that He would express His love in steadfastness and faithfulness. Perhaps the most important word in the Hebrew bible is the word traditionally translated *“steadfast love.”* Steadfast love is love with an exclamation mark! In the Old Testament, God’s love is compared to the mountains as a metaphor for immovability. We can chip away at them and cut holes in them, but only God can move mountains. The only thing more steadfast than mountains is God’s love. Nothing is as immovable as a mountain, but sometimes mountains do move and so God’s love is more steadfast than the mountains. In Isaiah 54:10 God says to Israel, *“For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you.”* This means God is not easily discouraged from loving us. It means He does not take His love away at the first instance of our sin, or even the thousandth instance of sin. His love is firm!

Humans love one another until we get on each other’s nerves, or do something significant to violate our relationship with each other. God loves us with a patient, persistent and self-sacrificing love. We treat each other as our sins deserve, sometimes worse than our sins deserve. God treats us with steadfast love and is faithful to forgive us. It says in Psalm 103, *“He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love towards those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us! As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him.”* Of all our relationships we tend to be the most forgiving in our relationship with our children. We might break off a life-long friendship. We might get divorced from our spouse, but our children are always our children. What we condemn in others, we

forgive in our children. God calls us His children for the sake of Christ Jesus. Steadfast love means that God loves us as a parent loves his or her children, except that His love is stronger, more patient and even more compassionate, forgiving and long suffering. The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever!

God created us in His image and even though sin has greatly dimmed, marred and affected the image God created in us, we are more similar to God than any other creature. The image of God is our ability to think, to reason, to have a sense of purpose. The image of God is our ability to love, for more than anything else, God made us like Himself in the ability to love. God made us in such a way that we want to love others. We make friends because we want to be loved and to love. We have pets, because we want another living creature to love! People once had dogs and cats to keep down the rodent population and to scare away large predators. But, that's no longer a concern for most pet owners. We have pets so we can love them. People love to walk the dog, pet the cat. People love to feed their pets. God made us to love, Him, other people, the animals of His creation. It makes us feel good to love. It gives us a sense of purpose to love.

Our love is greatly affected by the brokenness of sin and yet we don't abandon the dog when he is too old to fetch the stick. We don't say to our children, "I think it's time to move on, this just isn't working for me anymore." God's love is more pure, perfect and steadfast than the most loyal human love. Sometimes people abandon their pets when they become old, lose their cuteness and no longer do the things they think a pet should do. Sometimes people do turn away from their children and children from their parents. Our love is always an imperfect love, a love marred and affected by sin. God's love is different. He promises never to leave or to forsake us. In Isaiah 49 the Lord asks, "*Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.*" His love is steadfast and faithful. Our lives always have meaning and purpose in His love.

David found purpose and meaning in the steadfast love of the Lord. In Psalm 27 he sang, "*Although my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will take me in.*" As David's life drew to a end he could no longer do the things that in which he found meaning and purpose. Yet, he still had purpose and continued to find meaning in the steadfast love of the Lord. He knew the Lord always had a purpose for him, because He loved him. David knew that when life had forsaken him, the Lord would take him into His house to dwell in His love forever. We have the same assurance promised us in our baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. The Lord loves us. He created us to receive and live in His love for time and eternity. The Lord demonstrates the kind and quality of His love by giving Christ to die for us. In Christ we see that His love for us is steadfast, forgiving and faithful. In Christ's love our lives always have meaning and we always have purpose.

There are many things God gives us to do and wants us to do in life. He wants us to live in His love by living according to His holiness as expressed in the Commandments, all of which are fulfilled in love. He gives us responsibilities and calls us to serve in various capacities in our families, in the church and in society. His purpose for our lives in terms of service, change with time and are different according to when we are young, in middle life and elderly. God wants us to live in His love throughout our lives and to express His love in every stage of our lives, by doing good works that He has prepared for us to do. St. Paul says in the letter to the Ephesians, "*We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*"

God's greatest and eternal purpose for us is that we would simply receive His love in faith promised in our baptism, whether we are new born, a child, adult or an elderly centenarian. Remembering his infancy, David sang in Psalm 22, "*You are He who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.*" In Isaiah 46:4 the Lord promises His steadfast love in our old age saying, "*Even to your old age I am He, and to gray hairs I will carry you.*" There will come a time when all our tasks will be completed, but we will always and forever have purpose in God's sight. His purpose is that we would receive His love as mercy, forgiveness and peace for the sake of Christ Jesus. His purpose will be fulfilled when we share in Christ's resurrection to everlasting life. His purpose will be fulfilled, but it won't be finished. His purpose will endure to eternity, as we fully and forever live in His love. The Spirit of God who has breathed His love into our hearts through faith in Christ Jesus, keep us to that day. In Jesus' Name. Amen