Life on Purpose
By Claude Hickman, Steven C. Hawthorne and Todd Ahrend

There’s a difference between going out for a walk and setting out on a journey. When someone takes a walk, they may stroll along, meandering here or there. They may be getting out, but they are not necessarily getting anywhere. But when people set out on a journey, they pack up and pull things together. They choose a course and move decisively. People on a journey move with purpose.

Map Quest
When it comes to God’s will, many of us want the GPS version of God, hopefully with a turn-by-turn British-American voice prompting us at every intersection. Sometimes God gives people very specific instructions, mapping out what they are to do in detail, but this is rare. The world, however, is a map factory. It continually bombards us with plans for success, agendas both personal and political and road signs that read “happiness just ahead.” Most maps lead toward personal gratification and status or just loop back to the status-quo.

A map is very appealing to a person looking for direction. But the map is an easy way out. It appeals to the lazy. God gives people direction more than directions. He will not rob you of the faith-building experience of obeying Him based on what He says, not on what you see. We cannot expect to get all the detailed instructions before we are willing to begin traveling the path. The Bible doesn't lay out a “map.” It gives us a “compass.” God calls you to join Him in journeying in a steady direction toward a grand global destiny. He is calling us to follow a compass and to evaluate any maps that come our way by His over-arching purpose.

From the beginning, God has been orchestrating history toward a climactic destiny for all the earth, a redemption that fulfills his purpose for people. You could call this the “True North” of His purpose. God graciously invites our participation in this grand journey by giving us the compass of His word and pointing us in the direction of “True North.” Following this call not only brings us into the awesome significance of aligning our hearts with God’s own passion, we also join a journey pursued by believers of all time.

The most limiting thing about maps is that they only give you alreadycharted territory. They can only take you as far as someone else has been. Mapped-out life plans don’t push you to pioneer and explore what hasn’t ever been done. If you keep following the compass

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Jesus gives us, you will find yourself involved in pushing His global task toward completion. To finish His journey means that at some point you move beyond the edge of the maps.

Our maps will change from season to season in our lives, but the compass is unchanging. The compass is the same for all God’s people. It always gives the direction to True North no matter what your language, your country, your social status, your family or your ability. It stands as a firm standard. By marking out True North and giving us a compass, Christ enables us to think, pray, plan, coach, challenge, create, suffer and labor with many others. It's not a solo pilgrimage. He’s summoned us to step into and help fulfill what believers of previous generations have already begun and what millions of fellow-followers are pursuing at this moment.

Living life on purpose means letting God’s agenda and the True North of His heart become the guiding principle for all our decisions. If they thought it was possible, most people would love to find themselves moving in a purpose that culminates the story of the entire world in magnificent ways.

**Practices of the World Christian Journey**

People who live their life aimed at Christ’s global purpose are sometimes called World Christians. World Christians pursue God’s purpose as the focal point of their entire life. They aren’t superior to other believers. They’ve simply decided to allow every decision of their lives to be directed by the magnetic pull of God’s purpose. The World Christian says, “I’ll do whatever it takes to be faithful to Christ and to live strategically for His purpose.”

We used to think it helped to describe World Christians as either goers or senders. We thought this opened things up for everyone by offering role categories for people who weren't going to work full time in cross-cultural ways, but were finding other ways to further the cause, such as sending or mobilizing missionaries. Then we realized that the more that we talked about well-defined roles of “goers” and “senders,” the more that it seemed to push people to choose one of the roles for the rest of their lives. And you guessed it: pretty soon we were publishing “maps” to help people set their lives on autopilot as senders. At the same time, some of the “goers” who were in the pipeline to become candidates for mission service were often blind to possibilities of doing what some super-senders do: mobilizing many others for God’s purpose. Instead of exclusive tracks, we needed to call a new generation of World Christians to think beyond strict categories and to live holistically toward the evangelization of all peoples.

Most World Christians will find themselves passing through different seasons, enjoying a variety of relationships, working in different vocations and even moved by different motives. Be sure to learn to excel in one or a few of the four practices mentioned below. You may major in one, but remember to minor in the others. Plan on practicing them all. That is the World Christian lifestyle.
1. The Practice of Going: Immersing Ourselves Cross-Culturally

Christ commands all of His followers to be a part of reaching all nations. In our globalized world, it’s unlikely that you’ll spend your entire life without an opportunity to declare or display the gospel of Christ to people of other cultures, even if you never get a chance to go. You may never go to another country, but Christ does command all of us to go to people with the gospel.

Many have old, or odd, stereotypes of what missionaries are like and what missionaries really do. The models and modes of cross-cultural work are changing rapidly with international commerce and communication. Business as mission, tentmaking and other creative approaches have allowed many believers to thrust themselves into strategic opportunities. It has also ramped up the number of short-term opportunities. Chances are you’ll probably be part of short-term mission efforts from time to time. If you’re seeing life through the World Christian compass, you’ll easily see that most of the fruitful endeavors are going to be accomplished by the workers who have been there for years. Link with what’s long-term. Connect with the local people. Seek to serve the long-range efforts. Aspire to go as far as you can, to reach those farthest from Christ.

Some of these new opportunities can make it seem that cross-cultural mission work can be done as an easy part-time avocation. If you aim to make “going” the primary practice of your life, don’t be an amateur. Do it with excellence. Get training (not necessarily schooling) under the most effective missionaries that you can find.

2. The Practice of Welcoming: Connecting with Those Who Come to Us

We use the word “welcoming” as a way to describe going to people without traveling as far. Working with people who are visiting or have newly migrated to our home communities can be every bit as significant as going to distant continents. Reaching out to internationals should be a natural practice for those of us who claim to care for God’s purposes toward all nations. An absence of concern for internationals around us can expose some disconnection and failure to embrace the vision into our entire life.

I [Todd] remember my wife telling me about meeting a university student who sincerely declared her passion for reaching China. She prayed for China. She said she was called to China. She wanted to learn Chinese and it was all that she could do not to quit school right then and go to China.

Finally, my wife asked her, “Well, are there any Chinese students here at your campus? The girl looked back at her, kind of confused, then responded, “Well, yeah, but they kind of cluster together and they all live in one set of dorms.”

My wife continues, “Well, have you ever been to the Chinese dorms?”

“No,” she replies, “It’s all the way on the other side of campus. And they all just stay to themselves!”
Finally, the obvious is gently pointed out, "Amy, what makes you think you are going to cross an ocean and reach out to Chinese people, if you won’t even cross the campus to reach out to them?"

International visitors are close to God’s heart (Lev 19:34; Deut 10:18-20). Over 40 times in the Old Testament alone Israel was commanded to care for the foreigner in their land. Today the strategic importance of welcoming can hardly be overstated. Migrating peoples are scattering all over the world as never before. Over 750,000 international students are studying in America right now. There are people in the USA from almost 200 countries of the world. This could be the largest number of countries and peoples to be found in one country at any time in history. Welcoming is a worthy point of emphasis for an entire life of ministry. Reaching internationals requires all the patience, diligence and passion required by long-term missionaries in distant lands. Make it a practice to welcome internationals; God Himself has moved them into your sphere of influence for a reason.

3. The Practice of Sending: Supporting Those Who Go

Some people find that Christ has enabled them with gifts and skills to work in supportive ways. We’re not talking about writing a check now and then. Occasional gifts and prayers are fine, but we’re talking about people who wake up in the morning and their ambition is focused on furthering the specific work of others. Those active in the practice of sending strive to complete the task by supporting the work of others. The practice of sending we’re talking about is filled with rich relational connection with missionaries, but serious sending is always vision-driven.

Prayer and giving are obvious ways to support mission enterprise. But when people focus their lives on fulfilling the total global task and apply their experience and gifts in creative ways to seeing particular mission efforts advance, they make surprisingly significant contributions.

A friend just received a one-time gift of $150 for his mission trip. The interesting thing is that it came from a seven-year-old. At $4 a month, plus birthday and Christmas money, that is quite a sacrifice when you are in the second grade! Another business leader is finding creative ways to offer his expertise at a distance. Another helps as a webmaster. Others make strategically timed visits to help with education or just to give missionaries a break.

Being involved in sending is also a practice for every World Christian to embrace. As Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:21). The World Christian allows the compass of God’s heart to direct their resources. The habit of sending involves a decision to connect our heart to God’s heart by investing our treasure in His mission. It is not a matter of the amount given, but an overflow of our inner spiritual life and affection for Christ.
I [Claude] know a couple in Los Angeles, Wendy and Scott, who are holding the ropes for others. They both work and serve as purposeful, committed senders. They have decided to live off of his salary and give her entire salary away to missions work. They are making a deep impact on the world, living life on purpose, but they never leave California. Living for God’s purpose in the world is not an issue of just location, but of lordship and lifestyle.

4. The Practice of Mobilizing: Empowering Others in His Purpose

The practice of mobilizing means working to cast vision for the world in such a way that other believers can see God’s great story and find ways to be part of it. World Christians who mobilize are active in educating, networking, organizing and rallying people to the journey for the cause. Some focus on challenging people to serve as missionaries. Others major on building up passion for Christ’s global glory throughout their local church.

Just about anyone who has a vision for God’s purpose in the world has at one time been mobilized. Whether someone asked them to go on a short-term trip, brought them to a missions conference, or invited them to pray for far-off countries, somehow they were introduced to God’s global purpose by someone else with that vision.

It makes strategic sense that many have made mobilizing the primary practice of their lives. Since fulfilling the global task will require many more to be engaged in the cause, those who mobilize find creative ways to enlist as many as they can to find a vital part in the work of world evangelization. Those who mobilize are not motivated by the prospect of recruiting more human resources to be cogs in some great mission machine. Instead, they yearn for others to know the joy of living maximum lives in fulfilling God’s love for all the world. A.T. Pierson once said, “Christians need to be converted to missions, just as the lost do to Christ.” In many ways, missions is the gospel for Christians, revitalizing their lives with passion for Christ and His global purpose.

Everyone naturally mobilizes to something, “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt 12:34). That’s really what mobilizing is all about. They allow the things that are on God’s heart to burn so brightly in their hearts that it begins to come out in their speech and overflow onto others.

Essential Disciplines: Turning Grand Intentions into Real Life Decisions

Holding a compass and facing the True North of God’s glory doesn’t really move you anywhere at all. It’s not much better than standing still at a big map at the mall reading “You Are Here.” Aiming at purpose is hugely significant, but to get anywhere we have to make hundreds of choices every day.

Forgotten New Year’s resolutions should be enough to tell us that we don’t have autopilot settings to carry out our intentions, no matter how good our intentions may be. We all tend to drift. No one sets out aiming for smallness. We’ve all let life and the waves of
social pressure carry us along. It's easy to get caught up in the mainstream and find ourselves too weak to fight the current. Passive defaulting to the world’s crosscurrents in the everydayness of life produces small people living for small things.

To fight the drift, we need to keep making key choices over and over again. The word Christians have used to describe regularly setting yourself to make small but vital, lifestyle decisions, is the word disciplines.

There are many disciplines that Christians have found helpful to keep them growing in effectiveness for centuries. They are habits in the good sense. We think four of these disciplines are crucial to living life on purpose. Find creative ways to grow by practicing these disciplines. If you don't, you will either drift away from God's purpose or fail to be part of fulfilling anything significant in God's purpose.

1. The Discipline of Community: Walking with Others

Make choices to connect deeply with others who are following Christ. No one gets very far going alone. Because this self-orientation saturates our culture, Americans may be particularly prone to making life all about themselves. The heroes exalted in Western culture accomplish their deeds as solo acts. But the myth just isn’t true. Significant achievements are made by teams, families, churches, fellowships, arm-ies or organizations. Jesus called people to follow him as a band of comrades and friends. Don’t trivialize your life by remaining unconnected.

Be part of a growing church. Find ways to build up others in community. To extend yourself in meaningful relationships will require discipline. Don’t bail too quickly on your church because it doesn’t seem to be “missions minded.” Perhaps that is the very reason He has you there. Turn your search for friends around. Instead of looking for who can help make your life work better, look for ways to lift and strengthen others. You are someone else’s finest comrade. Be there for them.

Get connected or develop relational links to mission agencies. Plan on being part of something larger than yourself. To really join the journey that God’s been unfolding for thousands of years, don’t hesitate to develop relationships with people older and younger than yourself. Find a band of like-minded people to keep you accountable. Anything worth accomplishing is much greater than what you can do by yourself.

2. The Discipline of Prayer: Co-Working with God

World Christians discipline themselves to pray. But they aren't just praying about their problems or refreshing their spiritual life. All of that is important. But World Christians focus their prayer toward God’s global purpose. No matter how common it may be to think of prayer as a problem-solving procedure, World Christians pray about things that will bring glory to God and blessing to all the nations. No matter how small or great the
concerns, their prayers follow the compass reading that aims straight toward the True North of God’s purpose. Yes, they pray about everyday difficulties and hassles. But whenever they can frame their prayers as an appeal for God’s kingdom to come or for His name to be great, they keep praying with that end in mind. So prayer becomes an adventure instead of a chore.

Try to be persistent by meeting with others to thank God for what He’s doing and to discover different ways to keep asking God to accomplish His purposes. World Christian prayer is not a matter of attending more prayer meetings. It’s a matter of getting your life set on a prayer mission. By praying your way into the story of what God is doing in the lives of other people or other nations, you find yourself watching for what God has done and will do.

Keep your prayers informed with Operation World, prayer newsletters from missionaries or just by keeping track with the news. Facts are like fuel, but bits of information won’t spontaneously burst into flaming prayers unless you mix in the truths of Scripture. As you learn to pray using passages from the Bible, you’ll learn the art and the heart of using your own words to express God’s heart.

3. The Discipline of Simplicity: Living to Give

Unless you say no to the onslaught of multi-billion dollar marketing schemes, you’ll likely find yourself compromised by the American dream. Fight the system by practicing simplicity and by strategically giving. It may be harder to live counter-culturally, with a simple lifestyle, than it is to live cross-culturally in a foreign country.

Live to give. There are loads of good things written about handling money wisely, but for many believers the missing factor is a purpose great enough for them to make ongoing choices to live with less. Live joyously and gratefully. The discipline of simplicity isn’t really a matter of playing deprivation games to see how little you can live on. Living life on purpose integrates your life to be content in what God provides, and yet ambitious to see what great things God may accomplish.

Learn how to give regularly. Don’t fool yourself by occasionally making random donations. Some of the happiest people I know set their hearts on purpose by living on a portion of their income in order to give the rest toward mission.

Learn to give strategically. There may be missionaries you know. But look beyond your immediate circle of friends, investigating ways that you could contribute to great needs as well as great opportunities to advance the Great Commission.

4. The Discipline of Learning: Grow What You Know

Keep increasing in the truth of God’s word and the facts of God’s world. Without a fresh flow of information, you’ll find your zeal fades and passion easily becomes misdirected. I
Steve have a friend who identifies one new country each year. She reads books and scans history from that country. She watches the news, always keeping an eye out for her country of the year. And most of all, she prays for the people of that country. Along the way, she never fails to run into people from each of the countries she’s selected. Find your own ways to keep expanding your awareness. Push your perspective. Keep on refining the paradigm you are using to shape your worldview. If you don’t keep moving in this discipline, your passion can dim. It’s as if clouds form and cover up the North Star of God’s vision. Eventually, it’s a distant blur of some fad that you were caught up into for a season, nothing that will weigh heavily on your life for God.

Living For Something Worth Dying For

It’s obvious that these disciplines aren’t a recipe for merely having more happy days than sad ones. Living with disciplined intentionality for Christ and His purpose brings the joy of knowing you are living a life of significance. It’s not a matter of living to your fullest potential. At least do that. The real issue is living for something that really matters.

Visiting graveyards can make you think about what matters. I [Claude] once visited the grave of Leonard Ravenhill, a passionate leader who challenged many to live radical lives for Christ. His gravestone simply reads: “Are the things you are living for worth Christ dying for?” Reading that rattled me for a while. But then a joy started welling up within me. Because I realized that I could answer, “yes.” I may be a small piece in the big picture. I may be a bit player in the great drama. But I’m going for it. I’m using all the days and strength God gives me to help fulfill exactly what Christ died for. Jesus gave His life to see God served by some from every people. It’s joy to be living for that same purpose.

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