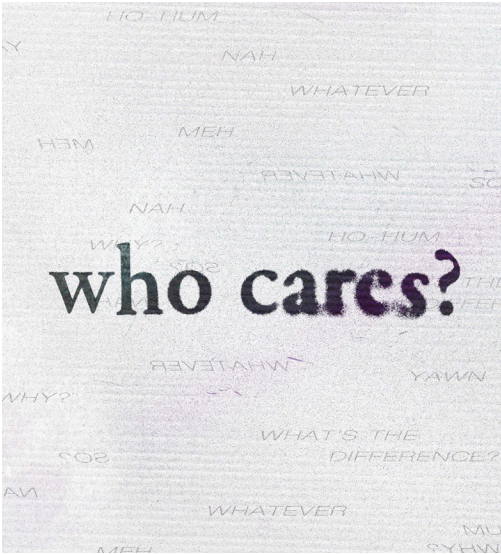




Sermon Growth Guide

October 13, 2024

Who Cares?



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Who Cares? – “What’s the Difference?”

Numbers 11:10-17

Key Verse: “If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin.” (John 2:11)

Big Idea: Without purpose or the hope that we’re making a difference, something can die within and apathy and discouragement can set in.

Foundations

This passage is a bit strange, in that everyone in it is unhappy! The Israelites complained. God reacted to the grumbling. And Moses preferred for his to life end rather than continue with what he was dealing with.

Moses offers a perfect example of how despair can arise when we lack a sense of purpose to our days. An absence of purpose can result in apathy and aimlessness. It can lead us to question whether what we’re doing really matters. When purpose isn’t propelling us forward, we can simply end up moving from one activity to another, and our lives can feel smaller.

God’s response to Moses wasn’t to relieve him of responsibilities or honor Moses’ request to end his life. What he did do was surround Moses with others who could help Moses get where he needed to be. And our Lord does the same for us.

Moses’ story offers a helpful reminder that when there’s not a “we” in our lives, our perspective can become clouded and we can more easily become discouraged about the trajectory of our lives. We’re built for community, and we’re at our best when others can help us see what we lose sight of.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Numbers 11:10-17.

What encouragement can we draw from our Lord continuing to love and lead the Israelites despite their frequent grumbling and disobedience?

Applying God’s Word

Walter Wright states, “Purpose is what gets us up in the morning, what energizes our day. Purpose motivates and channels our choices. It creates goals, objectives, strategies, or hopes that pull us forward.”

What would you say your purpose is in life, that gets you out of bed in the morning?

What can make it difficult at times to identify a sense of purpose, or to feel like you’re making a difference?

Who during your lifetime has provided helpful insights into what God has placed within you and how you might live that out.

Witnessing God’s Word

When you think of the story you’re writing, what experiences or seasons have been most precious to you? Who is someone you can encourage this week in their writing of their story?

During our sermon series “Who Cares?” we’re exploring different facets of apathy that can rob us of life and energy. It’s now my turn to contribute, but I discovered this week . . . I didn’t want to! Who cares?! Let’s close in prayer and get out sooner. It’s actually concerning to see how many faces lit up at that prospect!

The longer I’m here, the more I marvel at all the life stories that fill this space on Sundays we worship together. Each of you are living out a story that’s precious and unique to you. The same is true of the person next to you. We’re all writing the best story we can with the material life gives us.

My story is different from yours, and yours is different from those around you. Yet there are common elements to all our stories: loss, joy, disappointment, accomplishment, and pain. When you think of the story you’re writing, what experiences or seasons have been most precious for you? It might be meaningful to share with someone this week. In addition to our stories intersecting during times of worship together, we also experience an intersection between our stories and the stories of scripture. As we look at today’s passage, we long to hear something from Moses’ story that will speak into our stories.

Today’s sermon theme is “What’s the Difference?” we want to explore the importance of purpose to our days, and the hope of making a difference with our lives. An absence of this can result in apathy and aimlessness—questioning whether what we’re doing really matters. Today’s text consists of a conversation between Moses and God. To understand why it’s filled with so much drama, we need to grasp the larger context. Moses and the people he led out of Egypt were still in the desert, between where they’d been and where they wanted to be. I wonder who of us here today is in a different place than we’d like to be in the story we’re living out? If I asked for a show of hands, I suspect we’d see more than you might expect.

Chapter 11 begins, “the people complained about their hardships in/ hearing of/Lord” (11:1). But this wasn’t simply a one-time complaint; the Israelites were developing an attitude! Throughout this chapter and the next, a spirit of discontent is expressed on multiple occasions. In response, God sent fire upon the camp, until Moses’ interceded and the fire ceased.

From that point on, lesson learned—Moses and the Israelites lived happily ever after. Well, not exactly! You would assume the Israelites would have learned from these events and pivoted to a spirit of gratitude. Yet by verse 4 the Israelites were complaining again! This leads to the drama of today’s text:

“Moses heard the people of every family wailing” (11:10)

“The Lord became exceedingly angry” (11:10)

“Moses was troubled” (11:10)

Moses joins the complaining, accusing God of burdening him with such a great demand:

“Why have you brought this trouble on your servant?” (11:11-13)

Moses goes on to acknowledge his limitations:

“I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me.” (11:14)

Then Moses declares that he’s done, and asks God to put him out of his misery:

“please go ahead and kill me.” (11:15)

That feels like a pretty extreme response, doesn’t it? Moses’ words reveal a deep despair at the thought of not accomplishing anything. When God called Moses to lead His people, this became Moses’ life purpose. Yet now, peoples’ complaints ringing in his ears, Moses questioned whether he

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was really making much of a difference. Moses' response illustrates how absence of purpose can lead to apathy and despair. Without the hope we're making a difference in some way, something can die within. When purpose isn't propelling us forward, we may simply move from one activity to another, and our lives feel smaller. Saddleback pastor Rick Warren noted, "The greatest tragedy is not death but life without purpose."

Inconveniently for us, purpose usually won't reveal itself on a neon sign. Yes, a burning bush helped Moses learn how he would make a difference with the rest of his life. But meaningful purpose can be harder for us to identify, particularly during certain seasons of life. Some of us may be dealing with limitations of various kinds that make our lives feel small and purposeless. Others are experiencing challenges so daunting, larger purpose to our lives is beyond what we can ponder. Or maybe we're at a place in life right now that it's hard to believe we could possibly make any kind of difference.

Yes, recognizing meaningful purpose to our days can be challenging. But if you hear nothing else today, hear this: You are a beautifully unique creation of God, and He longs for you to live out what He's placed within you. Each of us have been given a unique blend of gifting, passion and potential that's part of the story we're writing. God want us to make the most of the lives we've been given, to make a difference in the world around us.

As Bob Buford put it, "God has created a grand narrative for you to live out and is determined to prevent you from writing a smaller, less significant part than the one he has already written." God's purpose for you can fill your days with meaning, and provide a sense of direction you can steer your life toward.

How do we understand what God has placed within us so we can live

it out? Asking our Creator to help us understand what He sees in us is always a good first step. And there's something else in today's passage that may help answer this question. God's response to Moses offers a reminder that He often works through others to help us get where we need to be.

The Lord said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the tent of meeting, that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them. They will share the burden of the people with you so that you will not have to carry it alone. (Numbers 11:16-17)

God didn't relieve Moses of his responsibilities, and He certainly didn't honor Moses' request to take his life. What God did do was bring others alongside Moses to help him accomplish what he'd been given to do. After sharing responsibility with the 70 leaders, Moses regained a sense of purpose. Though it wasn't always easy, he continued to make a difference in his role in the years that followed. Moses' story is a helpful reminder: when there's not a "we" in our lives, our perspective can become clouded. Our sense of purpose can falter, and apathy and discouragement can more easily creep in. We're built for community, and we're at our best when others help us see what we can lose sight of.

William Wilberforce was known as the "father" of the British abolitionist movement in the early 19th century. His efforts were instrumental in making Britain's slave trade illegal. But it took decades to accomplish this, and there were times it seemed Wilberforce wasn't making any difference. What helped him remain on course for so long was a group of friends known as the Clapham Sect. Over the years, they encouraged and reinforced the purpose

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to which Wilberforce had dedicated himself. We need the perspectives and encouragement of others around us to understand and live out our purpose.

I found this true here at First Pres 19 years ago. After 11 years as Singles Pastor here, I sensed it was time for a new ministry chapter. I'd begun looking around the country, when our Caring Ministry pastor, JoAnn Brechbill informed senior leadership that she was retiring. What you need to know is that I'd told JoAnn on multiple occasions, "I would never want your job!" I didn't feel I was made for the unpredictability and hard places of this area of ministry. So, when our Executive Pastor Jim Smith asked JoAnn about me taking that role, she responded, "John would be perfect, but he'll never take it."

As I sensed a need to begin pondering a shift to Caring Ministry, what eventually nudged me to step into this role wasn't my own instincts, but the feedback of others. Multiple people in the congregation affirmed that they believed Caring Ministries would be a good fit for me. Eventually, though I still had some doubts, I decided to lean into the input of my community around me. I reasoned that I surely couldn't have fooled that many people for so many years! Today, I can't imagine a more rewarding role than the one I stepped into 19 years ago. But it may not have happened without others helping me see what I couldn't on my own.

Walter Wright stated, "Purpose is what gets us up in the morning, what energizes our day. Purpose motivates and channels our choices. It creates goals, objectives, strategies, or hopes that pull us forward." If someone were to ask what your purpose in life is, that gets you out of bed in the morning, how would you answer?

If you understand your current purpose in life, rejoice in how God has made and positioned you. Continue looking for ways to live out what He's placed within

you. If you're unsure, would you lean into those around you who know you well? Ask them what they see. Seek their help in understanding what God has placed within you, how you might live that out, and where you may currently be making a difference you just can't see.

Some may be thinking, John, nice try—but there's no one in my life to do this for me. If that's the case, have I got a deal for you! Here at First Pres, we have trained Stephen Ministers, available to meet for an hour a week to listen and encourage. They could serve as a helpful sounding board for you to process how to understand and live out your purpose. If life is so hard that you can't even think about the larger question of purpose, we also have counselors who can be a resource. Both groups are at tables today in The Commons or Plaza immediately following this service. If you long for greater clarity and purpose in your life, would you make your way there after the service or call our Caring Ministries office during the week?

I began by noting that each of us is writing a life story very precious to us. Though every one of our stories is different, there's a common thread: God desires to write purpose into the stories we're living out, to use us to make a difference.

Would you take some time this week to explore what God has made you for? The gifting and interests that He's placed within you. The opportunities that He places before you. If understanding seems elusive, seek feedback from those around you: friends, family, a Stephen Minister, or a counselor.

For God has created each of us to live a life of purpose and to make a difference with our days. As we do, our hearts will delight, we'll bless others, and we will hold apathy at bay.

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