

Living and Giving as an On-Purpose Woman **Mary Tomlinson**

How would you define your life today? Out of control, stalled, or controlled momentum?

Or said another way: Are you feeling more “on purpose” or “off purpose” these days?

At an earlier Inspiring Generous Joy experience, a woman shared that she felt very off purpose when she would leave bags of clothing to be picked up by a local agency. When she told me that her two-word purpose statement was “nurturing worth,” I asked if she would feel more on purpose if, instead of leaving the clothes on the front porch, she would actually go to the women’s shelter herself and deliver the clothes and get to know the women there and “nurture their worth.” Her eyes grew big and sparkled as she said, “That would feel so much more satisfying for me!”

As women—and especially Christian women—our hearts yearn for a life that is filled with peace, brimming with joy, and focused with clarity. We want those around us (our children, friends, co-workers, family) to see Jesus in our lives, and we want a fulfilled life knowing we are doing exactly what He has called us to do.

Too often, our peace can become strained, our bucket of joy is low or even empty, and we experience a lack of clarity. We wonder who we are, what’s most important, and what our next steps should be. We desire to discover (or rediscover) the sense of our unique purpose.

We revisit the ultimate question in life: “Lord, why am I here?”

Many of us read Rick Warren’s book *The Purpose-Driven Life* in which he states: “God put you on Earth to do five things: bring God pleasure, be a part of his family, become like Christ, serve God, and share your life message.”

Because each of us will live out these five things in different ways, I believe that there is another level of discovery to understanding our unique purpose.

When I coach women in becoming on purpose, I’ve noticed the desire of their hearts is expressed as:

- *I want to have clarity and clear goals*
- *I want to have a firm sense of where God is leading me—in a concrete way*
- *I am tired of being afraid and living in fear*
- *I want to find my purpose—learn my purpose and begin to work and live into it*

- *I want to have less stress and a more peaceful and calm life*

And thus begins a wonderful adventure of self-reflection and prayer to become an on-purpose woman. My hope is to share a few thoughts from my decade of working with women, all based on Kevin W. McCarthy's book, *The On-Purpose Person*.

It's an exciting and adventurous quest to believe that we each have a unique purpose on this earth. Psalm 139:13 says, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb." Knitting is deliberate, intentional, and focused—one stitch at a time—and results in a one-of-a-kind creation. The Psalm doesn't say, "I was mass produced by the machine of heaven!"

Author Max Lucado references this verse in his book *Grace for the Moment* when he writes: "Every thread of personality is tenderly intertwined. Each string of temperament deliberately selected. Each one different. The Creator, the master weaver, threading together the soul. No two alike. None identical."

Imagine how silly it would be to try to vacuum the floor with a toaster. It wasn't designed to do that! And many of us are equally frustrated trying to do things we were not designed to do. When we discover our special design—our DNA—we focus our energy on what we are made to do (and avoid those things which are off purpose for us).

Discovering this unique and embedded truth within us takes time, reflection, and prayer. We are in fact boldly asking God for wisdom regarding how He created us, to which He would say, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you" (James 1:5).

Our purpose emerged with us from our mother's womb—and it is permanent. From the beginning, we were made with a purpose (and as we can observe even in children, each one arrives unique in their own very special way!). So our purpose was pre-designed and does not change during our life.

Ephesians 1:11 says, "In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will."

I've had women say to me, "Well, my purpose just went away to college." Nope, that child is not your purpose. You had purpose before that child was born and will have purpose after that child leaves home. You can, however, live out your purpose with that child as well as all other aspects of your life.

I love the story of a man marveling at the newly created statue of David and asking the sculptor, Michelangelo, "How did you know that David lay inside that enormous marble block?" to which the artist replied, "David was always there. I just chipped away what wasn't him."

The On-Purpose Person process models this mentality as we chip away, exploring things like:

- What are times in your life when you were most on purpose: You jumped out of bed in the morning, time flew, you were great at whatever you were doing and even after a long day you were energized?
- What are times in your life when you were off purpose: You hit the snooze alarm again, time dragged, you were adequate at what you were doing, but completely drained at the end of the day?

Taking it the next step: What do your on-purpose and off-purpose moments have in common? The goal is to be more on-purpose more of the time!

Mari was a successful doctor, but was in a season of doubt and feeling very off purpose. Should she continue with her practice? How could she balance work and raise her children well? There was a yearning to write but who had the time? With prayer and self-reflection, she determined her most important desire was spending time with God and journaling. Fast forward to three years later—she is a successful writer with two published books, one of them titled *Walking with Jesus in Healthcare*. God used her medical experiences and her talent for writing to transform her life into what she did best. Her purpose statement “reflecting faith” rings true each and every day.

Another aspect of being on-purpose is knowing where we are going. Have you ever thought about what you would like your life to be like 10 years from today? Most women I encounter have never taken the time to think about their lives in the next decade. Consider how old you will be, how old your family will be, what you would secretly want your life to be like. As the Cheshire cat says: “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there.” Ten years goes by mighty fast these days, and without a vision and a plan, we will still be sitting here and wondering where the time has gone.

And what about today?

Our lives have so many aspects and we all want good things with our

- Family
- Spiritual life
- Friends and social life
- Vocation and work life
- Health
- Mental and intellectual growth
- Finances

Sometimes there is push-back with Christians feeling guilty for having “wants” in these areas. I hear, “As a Christian, I shouldn’t have any wants.” My response is rooted in the scripture Psalm 37:4: “Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.” So He knows that we have desires and He seeks to give them to us as we delight in Him. If He already knows

our desires, we might as well come clean, write them down, and prioritize what is most important for us at this very moment.

It's actually a liberating process—there's relief to putting everything on the table so we can see it and work with it—rather than feeling burdened and overwhelmed by carrying it all. The evil one loves to confuse and demoralize us by causing life to swirl around us, which can be paralyzing.

Judy attended a women's retreat where I facilitated the on-purpose process for about 60 women. In reviewing all her wants in the life categories, she was surprised that what was most important was to organize a family reunion. She had thought about doing a reunion "someday" but with a teenage daughter, life was too busy to add one more thing. The on-purpose process raised the level of awareness and importance of doing it now. She got to work! Three months later I saw her, and she was excited that the reunion had taken place. Despite busy schedules all her family was able to come from all around the country. It was a wonderful and blessed event. She was such an "on-purpose star" that I invited her to join me to speak at a luncheon several months later. She agreed, and then told me that after the reunion, her father had passed away. She was certain that God had gotten her attention to do the reunion before he was gone.

Consider today:

When have I have been most on-purpose in my life?

How can I begin to take the steps toward being more on-purpose more of the time?

Is now the time to consider the On-Purpose coaching process to discover my purpose?

When we take the time to know who we are, we can change the world with a life that is filled with peace, brimming with joy, and focused with on-purpose clarity.