

SEIZE
THE DAY

SEIZE THE DAY

Living on Purpose and Making
Every Day Count

JOYCE MEYER



NEW YORK • BOSTON • NASHVILLE

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INTRODUCTION

Recently I realized that I have already lived more of my life than what I have left, and somehow that made me even more determined than ever to make the most of my time. I think when we get past the age of fifty or sixty, we begin to think quite differently about our life and what we want to do with our time than we did perhaps when we were twenty, thirty, or even forty. We realize more clearly how precious time is, and in my case (and I hope in yours), we want to make sure that we don't waste any of it.

Do you ever have plans for the day and then get to the end of it and feel frustrated and perhaps even a bit angry with yourself? You had a plan that seemed good, but you didn't do much of what you planned to do, and, to be honest, you are not real sure what you did do. You were busy all day, but you only remember doing fragmented pieces of things depending on whatever seemed the most urgent at the time. Actually, when you think about it, you must admit you don't recall finishing anything significant.

Your plan was to pay the bills, go to the grocery store, get the oil changed in your car, and cook a nice dinner for your family. You really wanted to do the dinner because just last week one of your teenagers said, "Mom, why don't we ever all sit down to eat dinner together like we did when I was little?" You didn't have an answer because you're not sure what the reason is. It just seems that life is so busy that having dinner together never happens!

Is it hard for you to focus on what you really want and need to

do because of all the interruptions you deal with all day? Have your e-mail, Facebook, and Twitter accounts made your life easier or just busier? All of the modern conveniences can, of course, be very good, but only if we manage them and avoid letting the buzzes, dings, and beeps they make control us.

Are you steadily becoming the person you really want to be? Are you accomplishing the things you want to accomplish in life? Are you an “on-purpose” person, or do you drift through the days, weeks, months, and years waiting to see where life takes you? Do you need to take charge of your life? Is it time for a change? Do you need to seize the day today and every day?

I am usually a very goal-oriented individual, and I am motivated by accomplishment so I stay on track, but in the past year I found myself looking at the piles of things I needed and wanted to do and becoming so double-minded about which one to do first that I often ended up doing nothing, or at best just doing little bits and pieces of several things, none of which I finished. Oh, I finished the things I absolutely had to do, but, to be honest, I was wasting a lot of precious time and feeling aggravated at myself because I seemed to spend more time trying to figure out what to do than I did doing anything. I felt really overwhelmed and that is unusual for me, so I really started praying about it and wanted to hear what God would say to me about the situation. I felt life was ordering me around rather than me ordering my life, and I knew something was wrong.

As I prayed about it, God began showing me the importance of living life “on purpose”—something I had done most of my life but had somehow gotten off track. I think part of the reason why I encountered the season of passivity and double-mindedness was so I would feel an urgency to write this book. As I started listening to people, I found that a large percentage live their lives

day in and day out without accomplishing much of what they truly intended to. They were busy, but not sure what they were busy with. “I’m busy” has become the standard excuse for all the things we should have done but didn’t do. If you see a friend you used to hear from regularly but now cannot get him or her to return your calls, he or she will assuredly say, “I’m sorry I haven’t called you back; I have just been very busy.” We recently waited almost three weeks to secure an appointment for a carpet bid. When we called the salesman for the third time, he said, “I’m sorry it has taken me so long to get back to you—we have just been so busy!” What if God never answered our calls and then gave the excuse of being too busy?

I truly wonder how many people at the end of their life feel they lived the life they were meant to live. How many have only regrets about the things they did or did not do during their life? You only have one life, and if it is not going in the direction you want it to, now is the time to make changes.

When we live unproductive lives, we should not blame it on circumstances, other people, the way the world is today, or anything else. God created man and gave him free will. That means we have the ability to make choices in literally every area of life, and if we don’t make our own choices guided by God, we will end up with nothing but regrets.

God has a will and purpose for each of us, and His desire is that we use our free will to choose His will so we can enjoy the best life possible. I hope and pray that as you read this book you will learn to “seize the day” and start making the moments you have count toward fulfilling your potential!

P R E F A C E

This book is about learning to live life “on purpose,” therefore, I will be suggesting a lot of things you need to “do” or “not do” in order to make that goal a reality. However, it is very important to me that I don’t leave anyone with the impression that God’s love for us, or our right standing with Him, is the result of anything we *do*. That is “works”-oriented religion and is not what God offers us through Jesus Christ. I think the best way to make my point is by using the book of Ephesians in the Bible.

Ephesians is broken into six chapters. The first three chapters are all about how much God loves us, and it teaches us that His love is a free gift that is given unconditionally. Paul writes that while we were dead in sin, God made us alive in Christ, offering us a brand-new life, and He raised us up with Him, inviting us to enter His rest. He did all of this before we ever knew Him or even cared to know Him. Grace—amazing grace—provided everything!

Ephesians makes it clear that our salvation is not based on our works or anything that we could ever do. It is a free gift of God! Salvation is free! Mercy is free! The forgiveness of our sins is free! Although it is free to us, it was costly for Jesus. He gave His life, shedding His blood in order for us to enjoy relationship with God through Him.

For it is by free grace (God’s unmerited favor) that you are saved (delivered from judgment and made partakers of

Christ's salvation) through [your] faith. And this [salvation] is not of yourselves [of your own doing; it came not through your own striving], but it is the gift of God;

Not because of works [not the fulfillment of the Law's demands], lest any man should boast. [It is not the result of what anyone can possibly do, so no one can pride himself in it or take glory to himself.]

Ephesians 2:8–9

Our right standing with God is a gift of God's grace that is received only by faith and not by works or anything we can ever do.

However, beginning in Ephesians chapter 4, and continuing through chapter 6, the apostle Paul instructs the believers in the behavior they should have in light of what God has done for them. He mentions many things that will require choices, and he urges us to make the right ones.

The good things that we choose to do should always be done because God loves us and because we love Him, and never with the thought that we can “earn” or “buy” His love by doing them. Let me be clear that we do not earn salvation or the love of God; however, there are rewards for us here on earth (and in eternity) that are based on what we do while in the body. God doesn't want us to miss out on them, and we should not want to, either. Our right relationship with God should always provoke obedience, and that obedience leads us into a life that is truly amazing.

I am urging you today to live the best life you possibly can for the glory of God as a way of honoring Him and thanking Him for what He has done for you. I frequently teach on behavior, but all good behavior must be rooted in the foundation of our relationship with God through Christ if it is to have any real value.

Anytime we are struggling with “doing” the right thing, we

should *not* just try harder! We should abide in God's love, returning to the scriptures time and again that teach us about the love of God! Ask for God's help, and let Him strengthen you for what you need to do. The more you realize how perfectly God loves you, the more you will have a desire to do all He asks you to do.

CHAPTER 1

Man's Free Will

I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore, you shall choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants.

Deuteronomy 30:19

In order to seize the day and live the life God wants us to live, it is vital that we understand man's free will. God created man with free will and His desire was (and still is) that man would use that free will to choose *His* will. God promises to guide those who are willing to do His will (see John 7:17). It will be difficult to understand the message of this book unless we are willing to understand we are creatures with a free will and we are responsible for the choices we make. Free will is a huge responsibility as well as a privilege and a freedom. God will always guide us to make the choices that will work best for us and lead us into His plan for us, but He will never force or manipulate us into making that choice.

Free will is a huge responsibility as well as a privilege and a freedom.

Each day that God gives us is definitely a gift, and we have an opportunity to value it. One of the ways to do that is to use each day purposefully, not wasting time or allowing ourselves to be manipulated by circumstances that we cannot control. Each day

can count if we learn to live it “on purpose” rather than passively drifting through the day, allowing the wind of circumstances and distractions to make our choices for us. We can remember at all times that we are God’s children and He has created us to rule our days, directing each one into His purpose for our lives. In the beginning of time, God gave man dominion and told him to be fruitful and multiply and use the resources he had in the service of God and man. It sounds to me as if God told Adam to “Seize the day!”

C. S. Lewis said this about man’s free will:

God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong, but I can’t. If a thing is free to be good it’s also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata—of creatures that worked like machines—would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. And for that they’ve got to be free.

Of course God knew what would happen if they used their freedom the wrong way: apparently, He thought it worth the risk.... If God thinks this state of war in the

universe a price worth paying for free will—that is, for making a real world in which creatures can do real good or harm and something of real importance can happen, instead of a toy world which only moves when He pulls the strings—then we may take it it is worth paying.¹

God gave us free will and, if we intend to use it for God's purposes, we will pay a price to do so, but, as C. S. Lewis said, "It is worth paying." We pay a price not only to do the right thing, but we also pay a price if we do the wrong thing. I submit to you that the price we pay for wrong choices is much greater and leaves us sorrowful and filled with regret and misery.

I watched my mom and dad make wrong choices most of their lives, and I also watched them pay the price for those choices. My dad chose anger, alcohol, and a life without God. During most of his life, he chose to fulfill his sexual desires at a high cost to others. He sexually abused me, as well as several other people, for many years. He was regularly unfaithful to my mother, as well as violent, and she passively stood by and made excuses for not taking action to protect herself or my brother and me. Although I am happy to say they both died believing in God and having repented of their sins, I must also say they missed the good life God had planned for them, and they both ended life filled with regret for the choices they had made.

They did not make right choices because, in both of their cases, it would have required setting aside their feelings and trusting God to help them overcome their weaknesses. My father had a sexual addiction, and my mother was filled with fear. I am quite sure you could think of several people you know who are currently making wrong choices simply because they would find it difficult to do the right thing, or they are deceived into thinking

that their wrong choices will make them happy. It is absolutely astounding how many people destroy their lives because they are unwilling to do difficult things. “It is too hard” is one of the biggest excuses I hear when I encourage people to change their life by changing their choices to ones that agree with God’s will.

You and I can choose what we will do each day. We choose our thoughts, words, attitudes, and behaviors. We cannot always choose what our circumstances will be, but we can choose how we will respond to them. We are free agents! When we use our freedom to choose to do the will of God, He is honored and glorified. We can choose to make each day count—to accomplish something worthwhile—or we can choose to waste the day.

In his book *The Secret of Guidance*, F. B. Meyer said, “Perhaps you live too much in your feelings and too little in your will. We have no direct control over our feelings, but we have over our will. Our wills are ours, to make them God’s. God does not hold us responsible for what we feel, but for what we will. In His sight we are not what we feel, but what we will. Let us, therefore, not live in the summerhouse of emotion, but in the central citadel of the will, wholly yielded and devoted to the will of God.”²

Most of us know people who live entirely by their feelings, and the result is that they are wasting their lives. But that can change quickly if they will make a different decision, one that is in agreement with God’s will.

One of my grandsons chose to move away from home at age eighteen, and for the next year he stayed drunk daily and took drugs regularly. He didn’t work, and he lived in an apartment with several other young men who were on the same path, one of whom died from a drug overdose. For that year he lived completely according to his emotions. Thankfully, he realized he was going in a wrong direction, and he chose to call his parents and

ask if he could come back home. Within a few months he was restored, free from alcohol and drugs, and was busy developing a relationship with God. He is now working in ministry, married to a lovely Christian young woman, and raising his children.

He chose the wrong path and then, thankfully, he chose the right path. It is wonderful to realize that with God's help, we can correct mistakes we've made. When we make wrong choices, we always reap the result of them sooner or later, and it is never pleasant. Reaping what we sow is a spiritual law that God has put into place in the universe, and it works the same way every time. If we sow to the flesh, we reap from the flesh ruin, decay, and destruction. But if we sow to the Spirit, we reap life (see Galatians 6:8). No matter how much bad seed (self-will and disobedience) anyone has planted, the moment they begin to plant good seed (obedience to God), their lives will begin to change for the better. God's mercy is new every morning—that means He has provided a way for us to begin fresh each day!

God's Grace

God's grace is His undeserved favor and His enabling power. Grace is manifested when God does good things for us that we don't deserve. When we sin, we can repent and ask for God's forgiveness and, thankfully, His grace provides it freely.

When we choose to do God's will, our intent is right, but we may still need help following through and doing what we have chosen to do. It is God's grace that provides that help through the Holy Spirit. Often the thing God asks of us is something we find to be difficult to do without assistance, but with God all things are possible (see Matthew 19:26). Not asking God for help is the underlying cause of most failure. Do you regularly ask the Holy

Spirit, Who is your Helper, to help you? If you have not known to do so, you will see amazing changes in your life as you simply ask.

If I am very angry at my husband and have no desire to forgive him but I know from my study of God's Word and the conviction of the Holy Spirit that I need to choose to forgive no matter how I

God desires that we be dependent upon Him, not independent from Him.

feel, I ask God to help me do the good thing I want to do. I choose, and God provides the grace (power) for me to do it. I had to fail many times in order

to learn that I could not do it on my own. God desires that we be dependent upon Him, not independent from Him.

God gives us free will, and we can make right or wrong choices. Each of them carries with it a harvest that we will reap, for God's Word clearly states that we will reap what we sow. Yet, even if we do choose God's will, we will still need His help in following through. It is easy to decide on Sunday evening after dinner that you are going on a diet starting Monday morning, but can you follow through on Monday evening when you are at a restaurant and they bring out the dessert tray? That is often when we need God's help!

Jesus came filled with grace and truth (see John 1:17). He reveals truth to us and then gives us grace to walk in it if it is our choice to do so.

God's Sovereignty

Many people find it very difficult to reconcile God's sovereignty and man's free will. It is not anything we need to be confused about. Very simply put: we are partners with God. He works in

and through us to help us accomplish His will. When He finds someone who will choose His will and allow Him to work through them, that person becomes a light in a dark world, or an example of what life with God can be like. The person can be used by God to encourage others also to choose God and His ways.

If we have no freedom of choice, then we are merely puppets, with God pulling the strings. Our love for God is meaningless unless we are giving it freely.

This is what Andrew Murray said about human will:³

The human will is the power by which a person determines his actions, and decides what to do or not to do. His hidden, inward being, proving what his desires and dispositions are—foolish or wise, good or evil—are manifested in this will. The will is the revelation of character and life. What a person truly wills, he will infallibly seek to have done, either by himself or through others.

Your Will Be Done and Not Mine

When Jesus was suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane and said while praying, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42 NIV), He was clearly stating that He had free will. Jesus chose to go to the cross and pay for our sins. Jesus suffered in the Garden to the point where He sweated drops of blood. He knew His Father’s will and He chose to do it, even though it was apparently difficult to do so. And God, Who always sends us help at just the right time, sent an angel from heaven to strengthen Him while He was in the midst of His agony (see Luke 22:42–44).

This is a good example that may help us understand the price one must pay to do the will of God at times. Jesus paid a high price for our freedom, but in doing so, He opened the way for all men to be redeemed and brought into right relationship with God. The price was high, but it was worth it!

What will each one of us miss in life if we make wrong choices? I pray we never find out. How do we benefit if we live by our own self-will without considering the will of God? We may gain some momentary pleasure, but we always pay a high price once the moment passes. A man may, in a moment of passion, commit adultery, but he will pay the price in a lifetime of regret should he lose his wife, his family, and the respect of all of his friends. A young man may join a gang in order to feel that he fits in with his peers, but then spend his life in prison because of a crime committed in a moment of heated emotion. A person may spend his life not doing the things that will help him stay strong and healthy, and then regret his choices when disease leaves him weak and feeble. Let's choose to be proactive in doing what is right. Don't wait until you are forced into making a positive change by adverse circumstances.

Unless we learn the value of free will and begin to exercise it to make right choices, we will always be merely victims of life's circumstances and the bad choices those around us make. When I was a child and unable to make my own choices because I was under the authority of my parents, I was a victim of my mother and father's poor choices. But once I was away from home and had the ability to make my own choices, I was in a position to change my life. Sadly, I didn't know that, so I spent another eighteen years making wrong choices by acting according to my deceived mind and wounded emotions. At the age of thirty-six, through crying out for God's help, I received grace from Him to

begin studying His Word. When I did, I discovered I could make choices according to God's will and, thus, become a victor instead of a victim.

I am letting you know you do not have to be a victim! No matter how bad your past has been, God has a good future planned for you. No matter how old you may be, it is not too late for a new beginning. You may have had a bad start in life, but you can have a great finish. All you need to do is learn the will of

You may have had a bad start in life, but you can have a great finish.

God and start using your free will to choose His will. Lean on Him, depend on His grace to empower you to follow through on your choices, relax, and watch God work miracles in your life.

Another verse of Scripture in the book of John shows us clearly how man's free will, God's will, and grace work together:

I am able to do nothing from Myself [independently, of My own accord—but only as I am taught by God and as I get His orders]. Even as I hear, I judge [I decide as I am bidden to decide. As the voice comes to Me, so I give a decision], and My judgment is right (just, righteous), because I do not seek or consult My own will [I have no desire to do what is pleasing to Myself, My own aim, My own purpose] but only the will and pleasure of the Father Who sent me.

John 5:30 AMPC

Jesus begins by saying He is totally dependent on God, and that He can't do anything apart from Him. Jesus is referring to His humanity, not His divinity, in this verse. He listens for God's direction concerning His will and then He decides according to the will of God. *He uses His will to choose God's will!* Jesus had

pre-decided that all He ever wanted was the will of God, so the daily choices that went into making that happen were a foregone conclusion and, therefore, not that difficult.

If we choose to live for God and His will, we have already made the most important decision in life—this one decision will guide all other decisions. Have you made your decision? Who and what are you living for? Have you received Christ but not yet surrendered yourself to Him? These are really important questions to ask yourself.

Make Your Own Choice

Although God does give specific instructions regarding many of our choices, there are also choices that He gives us the freedom to make. We can use wisdom, follow peace, and do what we believe God would approve of. Unless I have a specific instruction from God in His Word or by His Spirit, my general guideline is to follow what I believe to be the heart of God (His desire and will).

God will let us decide what to spend our money on, whom to choose as friends, what and when to eat, whom to marry, where we want to work, and many other things. Yet, if our underlying desire is to be in God's will, we are always listening in our hearts for anything God may not approve of—and we are ready to change if that is what God desires.

I recently had an experience that might prove to be a good example. We were going to move from our current home about one and a half miles down the road where we could build between two of our children. It sounded like so much fun and we thought it might be a good choice for the future, but I wanted to be sure. I prayed diligently and waited to get some definite guidance from God. This continued for at least six months. I knew we wouldn't be doing anything wrong if we did move, but I really wanted to

make the best choice. I wanted to make the choice I would be happy with for a long, long time.

I knew it would be a lot of work and would cost money we didn't really want to spend, so I remained in indecision. I really wanted a definite yes or no from God, but He didn't give me one. It seemed clear that God was saying, *The choice is yours*, so we finally decided to keep life simple and stay in the home we have. I instantly felt relieved and knew I had made the right choice for the time being.

A great deal of the time God simply leads us by peace, wisdom, and common sense. I don't need to hear a voice to teach me not to spend more money than I earn, because that is common sense! I don't need to get a word from God about whether or not to take on more responsibility if I am already very stressed from the ones I currently have. That would not produce peace!

So my point is that we are free to make many of our decisions, but it is wise to be ready to change and follow God if His direction is different from ours. God's Word says that man's mind plans his way, but God directs his steps (see Proverbs 16:9). I highly recommend wise and thoughtful planning, but it is essential always to acknowledge God in all of our ways and give Him the opportunity to redirect us if we have chosen poorly.

We don't always make right choices, but we can always recover from wrong ones. Jesus said that David was a man after God's own heart who followed God's will (see Acts 13:22). Yet we know that David murdered Uriah, who was one of his close companions. He did this in order to cover his sin with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, with whom he had committed adultery, and who became pregnant as a result.

David's free will certainly caused

We don't always make right choices, but we can always recover from wrong ones.

him to make the wrong choice in this situation, and yet God still considered him a man after His own heart, because he was repentant and truly did want to do what he needed to do in order to be forgiven and restored. We don't have to manifest perfection in order to be accepted by God, but we do need to have a heart that is committed to always finding its way back to God's will.

Chapter Summary

- God created man with free will and His desire was (and still is) that man would use that free will to choose *His* will.
- Each day can count if we learn to live it “on purpose” rather than passively drifting through the day, allowing the wind of circumstances and distractions to make our choices for us.
- We cannot always choose what our circumstances will be, but we can choose how we will respond to them. When we use our freedom to choose to do the will of God, He is honored and glorified.
- When we choose to do God's will, our intent is right, but we still need help following through and doing what we have chosen to do. It is God's grace that provides that help through the Holy Spirit.
- Regardless of your past, you can move forward, making choices according to God's will in order to become a victor instead of a victim.