

Equipped to live your life on purpose

One of today's buzz-words is "purpose". We all want to know what our purpose in life is. Does God have a purpose for me? How can I find it? Where do I fit in the grand scheme of things?

As we celebrate Christmas, we're reminded again of the events surrounding the birth of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is purpose personified, "the reason for the season". But how much attention do we pay to the purpose that God had for Mary, Jesus' mother? In many ways, Mary is a picture of purpose and this can be seen most clearly in the ways she responded to the message brought to her by the angel, Gabriel.

Some of us are so familiar with this story that we tend to gloss over the impact that hearing the angel's words must have had on a girl in her early teens. Let's think about it for a moment... Imagine what it might have been like for Mary - she probably had no indication that this was going to be anything other than another ordinary day. It's very likely she was thinking about her fiancé, Joseph, and looking forward to her approaching wedding, imagining what life would be like married to him. Then, unannounced, an angel appears to her and starts talking to her. We don't know what the angel looked like - did he carry some mark of an angelic being or did he look just like an ordinary man? Either way, he just appeared! How do you think you would respond? Look at the ways Mary responded:

She responded in fear. She was "*confused and disturbed*".¹ Other bible versions use the words "*greatly troubled*" or "*thoroughly shaken*". In other words, she was absolutely terrified. And that was *before* she heard the angel's message! But she didn't allow her fear to make her unresponsive to God's purpose for her. Perhaps you're afraid of what God might want from you. Maybe it's fear of the unknown, fear of the unexpected, or fear of not being up to the task. Whatever it is, don't allow this fear to divert you from your life's purpose. As someone has said, "*Feel the fear and do it anyway!*"

She responded willingly.² But what might she have been thinking before she made her willing decision? Perhaps she wondered what her parents would say; how would they be able to understand? Then, what about Joseph? He would know he wasn't the father of this baby - how would he react? Would she lose him? She didn't know at this point that Joseph would support her wholeheartedly and even conform his life to hers. And what about her reputation? In a small town, there would no doubt be whisperings behind closed doors and she would be thoroughly misunderstood. Responding willingly to God doesn't necessarily mean that life is going to be easy. Can you relate?

She responded where she was.³ Mary didn't say "When I'm out of this place, when I have a better postcode, when I get on in life - then I'll do what God wants." Many years ago, when we were university students, we regularly gave out bible literature in a deprived area near our home. We lived in this particular part of the city a fairly short time, moving away when we both graduated. It would have been tempting to convince ourselves that we were just "passing through" and that surely God didn't expect us to have any commitment to our transient neighbours. Yet, who knows what seeds of truth were sown in someone's life during these student years that might have had an eternally significant impact? Don't wait until things are "better" before you respond to God's call - you might lose the opportunity, as well as the desire to respond, if you don't act where you are at the present time.

This Christmas, why not grab every opportunity to live your life on purpose?

¹ Luke 1:29 (NLT)

² verse 38

³ verse 26