

Dear Congregation,

I've been asked by the Stewardship Committee to share my thoughts on: The need to give.

This is probably the largest venue that I've ever considered sharing something so deeply personal to me and it's with a little bit of fear and caution that I write this letter.

For about 12 years I struggled with my "purpose" in life. I began to focus on this around the time I finished High School. This was a difficult question for me because as I thought about why God would desire to create someone like me, I couldn't put my finger on any quality that made me unique. I focused on the talents I felt I possessed, but none of them would set me apart from others enough to place me in that "special category". I knew it had to be a "special category" because if God is all knowing and all powerful and he took the time to create me, then whatever that "purpose" was, certainly had to be special. I knew it had to be there, I just had to be patient, follow my heart and mind and it would surface.

I always considered myself a hard worker in the classroom and on the athletic fields. I was going to find my purpose. I met so many good people along this journey. I helped friends with class work when they couldn't figure out an assignment. I helped teammates on the athletic field. But no matter how hard I worked, I couldn't differentiate my talent to a level that would be worthy of "God's purpose". College ended and so did my athletic career and now I became a "man" trying to find his place in the world. This was a difficult time to reconcile. I had just become "average" after doing well in the classroom and on the athletic field and there was a distinct possibility that God's purpose for me, simply didn't exist. I thought my gifts were to pass tests and win games and if the world's largest companies weren't begging to interview me and I didn't have an NFL contract, then what purpose could I serve? I didn't have a platform, so how could I have a voice, let alone a purpose.

As I went through my twenties, met my wife and started to understand what I wanted from life, she influenced me a great deal. I tried to always put others first, but clearly missed the mark on this search for purpose. Stacy never talked about herself, never demonstrated a need to be the center of attention, and was always and only concerned for the well being of others. Her parents are the sweetest and most caring individuals you could ever meet, I can see where she gets those qualities. After a lot of soul searching, summarized in those first two paragraphs, I began to think about how many times the word "I" and "me" was used in that search for purpose. My purpose shouldn't be "me" focused. I was looking in the wrong place the entire time. I have come to understand that my purpose comes through others and giving. I've come to trust that God will put opportunities in front of me to give. Part of my faith exercise is to not only trust in those opportunities but to seek them out. This gives me fulfillment and purpose.

I have a need to give. In fact, if you think about the smile you see on someone's face when you give a Christmas gift, I'd bet that most of us have a need to give. It's up to us

how we choose to fulfill that need. Giving love, encouragement, support, as well as money gave me purpose. My life is not about me, it's about everyone else. I can't share this without qualifying the obvious: I am by no means perfect, I have luxuries in my life while there are hungry people in our own town. My journey to fulfill my purpose as a flawed human being allows me to ask forgiveness as well. I believe in that need to give and to give without benefit or notoriety.

Sincerely,

Mark Snavelly