

One of my favorite things to do when I was a kid (aside from playing catch with my dad…that's right) was to play with puzzles. All kinds of puzzles, crossword puzzles, jigsaw puzzles, logic puzzles. I liked searching for the answers or fitting the pieces together, and loved the satisfying feeling of solving them or seeing the whole picture complete. Of course, patience was paramount and it helped that I was born with plenty of it. Puzzles are still one of my favorite past times. Today, however, aside from the usual ones, I often catch myself trying to solve a different kind: the puzzle that life is — purpose.

I say catch myself because it's usually not intentional (although it should be). It's just that sometimes, as you know, certain things happen which leave us scratching our heads and saying…humm. That's usually what prompts the 5 W's to invade my mind, becoming the edge pieces needed to start my "purpose" puzzles with: who, what, when, where, and why. That's me, and I know that's some of you, most of the time. Still, other times we choose not to bother with this purpose thing. Takes too much thinking. Plus we believe there is a Higher Plan for us and we think such will unfold itself one way or the other no matter what our actions, leaving us responsibility-free. But that would be the easy way though, and if we understand that Christianity *is* sometimes taking the road less traveled, responsibility then should be, among others, the main reason why we should try to figure out purpose. Once we have gone through the process of piecing together some of these puzzles, we come to recognize that the other reasons for doing so are beneficial to us and can turn out to make quite a difference.

Can it, though, and how, if the Plan is written, edged in stone, His will be done, etc., etc., etc.? Well, one thing I have come to believe is that for the most part the purpose of God's design for us is not so much in what occurs but in how we deal with what occurs. It's about this: circumstances + choices + free will = consequences. God presents us with circumstances. For each circumstance – a set of choices, giving us *free will* of course, and for each choice we make – consequences. Whenever I look back through the workings of this cycle after certain trying things have happened in my life, I have almost always been able to see how I got to where I was at that time and how God gave me the strength and courage to make it through many of those times. That alone, at the very least, if nothing more, is worth the trouble of working out a purpose puzzle.

Sure, even at first glance, the word "purpose" itself can feel massive and complex, and the thought of it intimidating. Quite the challenge. But purpose differs in extent and it's not always so difficult to decipher. We all have what sometimes seem insignificant and coincidental experiences, what some of us call God winks. *Like spotting a tiny little lizard in the room where you had been packing your bags for a flight you're catching early next morning which prompt you to close the bags at which time you discover one of the bags*

has the zipper completely out of commission which sends you to the store at the eleventh hour to buy a new bag…imagine the predicament minutes before rushing out to the airport should you have not encountered that lizard the night before. That was last July and that's my lizard purpose story. I know most of you have your own God wink stories. Coinkidinks as my daughter calls them.

But I'm sure most of you would agree that the most significant purpose stories in our lives involve people. Those in and out of our lives for a season, a reason or a lifetime, as they say. Whether family or not, all chosen for us nonetheless. Some to help us, others to mess with us, but all to test us. And it is in the process of reflecting and working on figuring out our purpose puzzles that we realize how we are used as God's instruments, according to the gifts and talents He has given us. And that we have a responsibility to make ourselves accountable to each other. An act that can help save us from falling into the hands of the enemy. An enemy who never misses a chance to come knocking at our door (otherwise we might open without even looking through the peephole). We all have a role to play in this Master plan, and how we react to and deal with circumstances can be an example to others. Second major reason for looking into this purpose deal.

When I think about the people in my life and the intertwining roles we play in each other's lives I'm often able to come up with lessons, whether learned or not, that came from most of the experiences and how they have affected me. Teaching me, preparing me and molding me into the person I am today. From every family member, every friend and every acquaintance, to the homeless guy who reaches out to you some mornings at the Cafe window. All divine connections. Their objectives precisely timed, since once purpose has been served, we are often asked to move on. And move on we must. Easier for some than for others (myself one of these others). This is where those of us who don't do well with change get stuck. Yet, we must be appreciative of all of our experiences no matter how difficult or painful they sometimes are.

The process of reflection and of reading between the lines of God's Plan can help sharpen our sight and make our calling a bit clearer for us to follow. It can also help us reach realization and acceptance. This acceptance allows us, wherever called for, to break down those walls of pride and resentment, and to forgive; and this forgiveness, allows us to move on. Ultimately it can all serve to get us into the right place allowing us to better deal with things.

Initially though, when we start to put together one of these puzzles, we are seldom ab
le to see the reasons for the things we must go through, the incidents and the people we are wondering about at the time, and we often become frustrated when the picture is not clear right away. That alone can be trying and affect us physically and emotionally. Not to mention what it does to our faith. This is usually where I find myself Mary Popping my way through this phase of the puzzle…with a spoonful of sugar. Why it

is essential that we go about this puzzling business patiently, listening for God's whispers, stepping back and looking from afar. Because the closer you get or you are the less you can see (sort of like my eyesight lately). But when realization hits and the pieces start lining up, it can be quite liberating…Next!…. How sweet that is. Time and the Lord take care of everything…something I bank on every day of my life.

Meanwhile, as we continue sorting out and interlocking those pieces, we must ask God to give us insight into our experiences so we can better know where it is we should be heading and how best to serve Him, allowing Him to use us to touch every life we come across. The benefits are mutual no doubt; as life can be an echo and gives us back what we give out. To live, as they say, in such a way that those who know us but don't know God will come to know God because they know us.

-by Connie Perez

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