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## SINGLENESS OF PURPOSE

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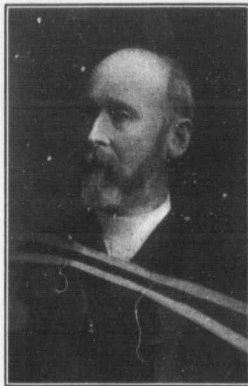
**A** TEXT that suggests the subject naturally occurs in the Gospel according to St. John, the fifth chapter and the thirtieth verse, where Jesus is reported to have said to those who were persecuting Him because He had cured a cripple on the Sabbath, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me."

Perhaps no other clause in Scripture expresses so completely what a single purpose means, and certainly no other character in history affords so excellent an example of what singleness of purpose is. As our divine exemplar, Jesus of Nazareth is our perfect pattern in all that pertains to character and conduct, no less than in what pertains to thought and life. But let us at the outset see what the word purpose signifies.

A purpose is a thing proposed or placed before the mind. It is that which one sets before oneself as something to be done, or something to be gained, or something to be reached. This definition shows that it not only implies an object, but also includes the end in view. It is thus a term of lofty import. Denoting a definite plan of action and a fixed determination to pursue it, it is something of which no person should be destitute. On the contrary, it is that which every one should have, and for two momentous reasons.

A purpose is momentous, first, because it is a *stimulus to exertion*. It acts as an inward force that impels us to exert ourselves and put forth honest effort. Acting within us as an impelling force, it enables us to produce desirable results. In that way it gives us both an interest and an aim in life, and makes existence real to us. By so doing it affects the course of our conduct and determines the trend of our development. Without something set before the mind, we shall have a listless attitude towards our work, and what little effort we may put forth will be misdirected.

A purpose is momentous, secondly, because it is a *secret of success*. Unless we have a purpose of some sort, we cannot hope to succeed in anything we undertake. That is to say, we cannot hope to accomplish much of value to ourselves or others, because without a purpose we cannot be certain of results. Having nothing definite before us, we do nothing and go nowhere with intent. A man without a purpose is like a ship without a compass—it is moving, but no one knows in what direction; or like a builder without a plan—he is working,



REV. DR. WORKMAN

but he is not sure what he will make; or like a watch without a hand—it is going, but it marks no hour and tells no time.

Notwithstanding the importance of having something determinate before the mind, there are people all about us who are leading purposeless lives. Aimlessly and listlessly they pass their days, considering neither what they are nor why they are here. They do not know, apparently, for what reason they were born, and do not care to be informed. Ignorant of what life means and reckless also of its meaning, such people do not really live; but, like so many human clods, may be said to only exist. Happy-go-lucky creatures, theirs is merely a haphazard existence at that. They are less rational than the beasts and birds, being less intelligent and less provident; for the latter not only obey the laws of their nature, but also provide for the wants of their offspring, as well as their own, whereas the former do neither of these things as they should.

Others about us have a purpose, but it is one of pleasure, or sport, or something no more profitable. A trivial purpose may be better than none at all, perhaps, because it helps one to organize oneself to some extent, and gives one a measure

of self-discipline. Sport especially affords a certain amount of self-control. But such a purpose is worth a very little, unless one have something loftier in view; because it terminates in self, and anything that terminates there ends where it begins, and for that reason, therefore, cannot amount to much. Pleasure and sport, however, are secondary considerations, and secondary considerations should be kept subordinate. Nay, they should not simply be kept subordinate, but made subservient to higher ends.

One cannot wonder that so many men make little headway, and that so many others fall, when one considers how the majority of them spend their time. The world is full of ne'er-do-wells and good-for-nothings because it is full of purposeless people, or people without a serious purpose. From the ranks of such people come most of the so-called derelicts of society, those unfortunate beings who are abandoned, like water-logged vessels, not so much because they are vicious or immoral as because they are indifferent to duty and destitute of purpose.

Then there are about us those who profess to have a plan of action, but meet with failure because they are unstable of soul, and, therefore, infirm of purpose. Unstable as water, they cannot succeed, much less excel; or, as the simile suggests, fitful and vacillating, they cannot achieve success, much less attain to eminence. These wander through the world wanting that steadiness of conduct which is necessary to accomplish anything of importance. Many a man who falls conspicuously might have had a brilliant career, but for his lack of stability; many another who is now forgotten might have had his name transmitted to posterity, if he had had a resolute will; and many another who is sleeping in an unknown grave might have made a record for great usefulness, had he pursued his plan of action calmly to the end.

There are thus three classes of shipwrecked persons, speaking metaphorically, who might almost as well have never lived, namely, those who have no purpose, those who have not a serious purpose, and those who have not a steady purpose. So far as society is concerned, it might be better for others, if not for themselves, had those belonging to the first class mentioned not been born, because such persons are always useless members of a community, and they are often most injurious to it.