

STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

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## ARE YOU LIVING YOUR LIFE ON PURPOSE OR BY ACCIDENT?

In life, we can choose one of two strategies: we can either live our lives *on purpose*, or we can live our lives *by accident*. You can plan your life and live your plan, or you can simply let the flow of life events and circumstances sweep you down the river of time, taking you wherever it will. This is the quintessential example of “go with the flow.” The latter, sadly, is the way most people live their lives—by accident. The former is how God created us to live—on purpose.

You can see this planning-ahead mindset in passages like Ephesians 5:15-16 (NIV), where Paul says, *Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.* Moses says it this way in Psalm 90:12, *Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.* Some might claim that there is something unspiritual about making plans, but we are in good company when we do. God made plans. In Jeremiah 29:11 (NASB) it says, *‘For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.’* (See also Hebrews 11:40a, Ephesians 1:11) Paul made plans; in Romans 15:23,24 he states, *I have had for many years a longing to come to you whenever I go to Spain.* (See also II Corinthians 1:15-17) And we are encouraged to make plans; Proverbs 21:5 declares, *Plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.* (See also Prov 16:3, 20:18a)

Unfortunately, when it comes to building our financial “empires” (we call this “getting ahead”), we can often find ourselves doing so without any real divine purpose behind it. Successful and disciplined people are able to continue building up their “pile of stuff” because they have become exceedingly good at what they do. They also find great emotional enjoyment and personal satisfaction in building, so they keep on building without ever giving much thought to where it will end up or even knowing when they are done.

With this in mind, there is a foundational question that we, as believers, need to ask ourselves. We must ask, “What is my purpose for continuing to accumulate more financial resources, especially when my pile of stuff is already higher than I will ever need it to be?” The key word here is *need*. In America the difference between needs and wants/comforts has become so blurred that we believe our wants and comforts have morphed into “needs,” causing us to consciously or unconsciously redefine what a need is. Jesus tells us plainly that accumulating excess material possessions as an end in itself is entirely futile. Jesus poses it in the form of a question, *‘For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?’* (Matthew 16:26) Those who accumulate more “just because they can” could be likened to the rich farmer who planned to tear down his smaller barns and build bigger barns to hold his surplus wealth. In no uncertain terms, Jesus called him a “fool.”

There is no greater example of the utter folly of building without a purpose than the story of Sarah Winchester. Sarah was the wife of William Winchester, the only son of Oliver Winchester, the founder and owner of the Winchester Repeating Arms Company. Sarah and William had a daughter who died shortly after birth in 1866. This was followed by the death of her father-in-law in 1880, and then her husband just a few months later, leaving her with a fifty percent ownership in the company and an income of \$1,000 a day (about \$21,000 a day in current dollars). Sarah believed that her family was under some kind of a curse and consulted a medium to determine what she should do. The medium told her that her family was indeed cursed by the spirits of all the people that the Winchester rifle had killed. She was told she should move out west and build a house for herself and all the tormented spirits who suffered because of her family. The medium also told her that if construction on this house were to ever cease, she would immediately die.

In 1884, Sarah moved to California and began one of the most bizarre building projects in American history. She began spending her \$20 million inheritance and regular income to buy and begin renovations on an eight-room farmhouse in what is now San Jose, California. From that day forward construction continued nonstop, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week until Sarah's death at age eighty-three—a total of thirty-eight years. She kept no less than twenty-two carpenters busy continuously. The sounds of hammers and saws could be heard throughout the day and night for almost four decades.

At its zenith, this seven story house contained 160 rooms, forty bedrooms, forty-seven fireplaces, seventeen chimneys, and 10,000 windowpanes. What made Sarah's lifetime building project so bizarre was that it had no discernable architectural purpose or plan behind it. Closet doors opened to solid walls. Windows were in the floor. Stairways led to nowhere. Railings were installed upside down. Drawers were only one inch deep. Trapdoors were everywhere. Useless chimneys stopped short of the ceiling. There were double-back hallways. Doors opened to steep drops to the lawn below. Many of the bathrooms had glass doors. The list of oddities runs into the dozens.

Could there be a better example of the ultimate outcome of “building without a purpose?” We may think that what we are building is not bizarre like Sarah Winchester's construction project. But the truth is that unless there is a divine purpose behind why we are doing what we are doing, God may actually find our building project just as meaningless and bizarre as the Sarah Winchester Mystery House. Paul addresses this very issue in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 (NIV) when he says, *If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.*

We need to ask ourselves these questions: “What foundation am I building on? What materials am I building with? And why am I building what I am building?” I think John Wesley had it right when he said, “Gain all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can.” If we adhere to this compelling “financial triad” as we labor on our building projects, we will be building on a solid foundation utilizing building materials of heavenly “gold, silver, and precious stones.” And in our building efforts we will discover that we are indeed living life on purpose.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR — E. G. “JAY” LINK**

E. G. “Jay” Link has a unique combination of being an ordained minister with a Master Divinity degree in Biblical Theology and a professional Stewardship planning coach who for over 40 years has been working with very affluent Christian families to enable them to optimize their Kingdom impact with all that the Lord has entrusted to them to manage. After retiring from his personal practice, he then served for five years as Director of Taylor University’s Stewardship Planning Ministry, which he launched for them. Most recently, Jay founded the Stewardship Resource Group to serve Christian ministries, colleges, and churches to better minister to their highest capacity families. He has written six books, hundreds of articles and has provided extensive training curriculum for hundreds of professional financial and legal advisors in how to provide stewardship planning services for their clients.