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No one has ever been able to explain to me how there can be a purpose without a will, an aim without an aimer.

The purpose of a table is determined by how we intend to use it.

If all human beings disappeared, the table's purpose would be decided by the spiders that build nests under it.

It would change from quilting table to prime real estate.

If existence itself has a purpose, therefore, then it must have come from the will of the creator of existence.

If there is no creator of existence, on the other hand, if the seemingly purposeful ability to sacrifice and to cheat, to love and to hate, to grow and to hide all just randomly popped into existence along with the organized rules of physics that govern it, then nothing has a purpose, and if there is no particular purpose, then anything goes.

There would be, in other words, no profound reason not to murder, for example, other than the inconvenient reality that others might object and put us in jail or worse.

In such a case, the only reason to follow rules would be to avoid negative consequences.

Everything would be governed by selfishness, and indeed, some people see the world this way.

In the twentieth century, for example, Ayn Rand argued passionately that altruism, acting selflessly, is an impossibility.

In other words, if we assume that there is no greater purpose determined by a creator, then the only purpose is created by our own selfish will.

It all flows logically from her initial assumption.

Those who understand that there is a God-instituted purpose, on the other hand, seek to live in accord with that purpose.

We do not follow the rules merely out of convenience, but because it means something to do so.

We have been designed to fulfill this purpose.

It was instilled into our very being just as a clock maker designs the clock with the ability to carry out the purpose of indicating the time.

Our longing for relationship, our desire to create meaning, the joy we experience when we give, all follow from the purpose that God infused into the creation.

Like a clock that runs backwards or not at all, we are, of course, also capable of *refusing* to fulfill this purpose, of behaving with selfishness and hatred.

Jesus therefore said, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

He assured us that everything is purposefully connected.

What this means is that the primary distinction is not between theists and atheists, as many Christians seem to believe, but between those who think there is a purpose and those who do not.

Some theists believe that God created solely for personal amusement or gratification.

For them, in other words, we are incidental.

There is no real purpose to our existence other than God's whim.

They think that God is fickle, blessing some and allowing others to go without for no particular purpose other than caprice.

They say things like, "We are so blessed," meaning, "We are doing well because God likes us for some reason. Too bad about you."

Theirs is not a God with a loving purpose.

It is a God who plays favorites, like a manipulative parent.

Jesus, on the other hand, teaches that there is a purpose and that God loves us all.

Those who act in accord with that purpose will find joy, though perhaps not earthly success.

Jesus and most of the disciples were martyred, after all.

Those who do not act in accord with God's purpose, on the other hand, will not gain that joyful reward, that peace in their heart, though they sometimes gain earthly success.

Matthew writes in the strongest Greek possible that those who do even small things in accord with the purpose of God will *never* lose their spiritual reward.

It follows automatically.

I remember when my British college advisor overheard a woman at the mall say to her son, "I ain't thinkin' about givin' you no quartah to play no video game."

It was a triple negative, and it almost broke his British brain.

In contrast, the ancient Greeks were more comfortable than even southerners with such constructions, and we find something like that in this passage from Matthew.

As one commentator explains, the Greek construction is akin to our saying "It ain't never ever gonna happen."¹

We will *never* not experience the spiritual reward of acting in accord with God's will.

Incidentally, the kindness and respect and support that that same advisor showed me continues to affect my life today.

He indeed gave me and many other students cups of water at a thirsty university.

He never won a McArthur fellowship.

1 <https://lectionarygreek.blogspot.com/2011/06/matthew-1040-42.html>

He had to fight for tenure and full professorship, but the things he did for the students left a mostly unrecognized yet profound ripple in the universe, like George Bailey, and he gained great joy from it.

It is of such things that Jesus speaks.

Even the so-called small things we can do have powerful effects, like the drip drip dripping of water and minerals that builds stalactites and stalagmites.

Love, in fact, rarely has an immediate and dramatic effect.

Power, on the other hand, can knock over a stalagmite and build an observation booth, even though the presence of the observation booth destroys the beauty of the thing that was to be observed.

Just as there are people who believe in God yet doubt that there is any steadfast purpose, there are also people who are atheists who think that there is a purpose.

I do not understand them.

Perhaps they simply have not worked things out to their logical conclusion.

Perhaps it is because, as I said, God's purpose is built into us so that we can follow it intuitively to some extent without working it out intellectually.

I do not know.

I have enjoyed asking friends who are atheists, "What is this God in which you do not believe."

Without exception, they describe a God in which I also did not believe.

Whatever the case, I think it is better to have a more conscious sense of our purpose so that we are even more effective in living it out.

So the primary divide seems to be between those who believe, consciously or unconsciously, that there is a purpose and those who do not.

The question remains, then, what is that purpose?

We have two sources to answer this—scripture and experience.

Just as we can gather the purpose of a clock in part by observing what a properly functioning clock is capable of doing, we gather something about our purpose from observing that we thrive when we build relationships, give of ourselves to others, and participate in community.

Statistically, we live longer, are happier and healthier.

When we have no meaningful relationships, focus only on what we can get, and have no real community, on the other hand, we tend to have more health issues, more loneliness, more depression.

Scripture confirms this.

It tells us that God created us for relationship and that, far from being uncaring, God loves us.

Ideally, we grow ever deeper in that love.

As Joan Chittister explains, “Religion is not a topic, not a course, not simply a body of beliefs. It is a process of becoming.”²

We can sense in our hearts when we are attune to God’s purpose and when we are moving away from it and allow ourselves to be shaped throughout our day-to-day activities.

Knowing what we are looking for seems to aid this process.

2 Joan Chittister, *The Gift of Years* (New York: BlueBridge, 2008), p. 101.