

# Coach House Church BEACONS

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## TRIVIAL PURSUITS

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What do you pursue? Are you the kind of person who develops long term goals and plans? Personally, my plans change with the seasons and I find it pretty hard to commit to just one goal or another. Most plans I pursue are short term, a few mid-term and one or two long term. For example, in the past I did an intensive language teaching course in the short term (a month), for the long term goal of becoming a language teacher. Now, I do a lot of art projects (in the short term), with a more long term view to pursue a more creative career. Plans change, don't they? The fuel and energy source for our plans are our desires – what we love, what we want, how we want to see ourselves and be seen, what we want to be remembered for. As desires change, plans also change, naturally. As our knowledge about ourselves develops, we modify our plans as we realise that some of the things we'd planned to do weren't really for us.

But this is all very existential isn't it? I described the plans we pursue as a means of self-discovery and self-betterment – in other words: what is the best career for me? What fits me best based on my ever growing knowledge? How can I fulfil my potential? All this is very modern. If you're from an older generation it's likely you slotted into a trade without much choice about it. If you're a bit younger, you might have got a degree before they became inflated and bit worthless by themselves. There's a lot of graft whatever course you chose. It's become quite common to speak about a quarter life crisis for millennials (my age category), because you're immediately faced with a million choices, the narrative that you can become whatever you want, a complex job market and spiralling housing costs. None of this enables you to settle down, and these issues bombard you the moment you leave university. But, even if you're two quarters past a quarter life crisis, we all live in a diverse and confusing world, and we try to do it while living like Jesus. We try

to figure out what things to pursue that are good, and we make plans to try and make the best of life.

I don't want to copy and paste a Bible verse as a cop out for the daily struggle to find meaning (and yes, in this current context and time, I'm willing to say it's a daily struggle). Even so, the Bible offers us helpful ways to interrogate our ambitions and plans. It won't tell you what job to get, it might tell you what job not to get. It will help you to make sense of the world and give you peace when life feels meaningless. But... It's not just a 'pity tonic' either to help you feel better about yourself, when life is trash and out of control. Taken as a whole, it explains what a genuinely meaningful and an eternally consequential life looks like, that we human being can access every day in real time. I don't have time to look at everything the Bible says, so, give it a read.

However, I was reading 1 Timothy the other day, and it struck me that Paul the apostle counsels Timothy, his young companion and a Christian leader, to 'pursue righteousness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness'. This sounds exactly like what you'd expect the Bible to say (no surprise there). But it's interesting because this advice comes in contrast to what other people, even church leaders, were doing. Many pursued material gain and just wanted to make bank, and live successful lives. Nothing wrong with having money or having ambitions (like with the plans I described earlier), but in order of preference, 'righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness' take priority. Now, I ask you, are these things limited to a particular career? It's possible they prevent you from choosing a career. Mostly, these things can be pursued anywhere. In fact, you can pursue them if you don't have a career at all. The way you interact with people at home, work or recreation can all be characterised by these attributes.

Does this mean aim to live a boring, depressing (but righteous) life without big material dreams or goals? No. However, despite what our culture tells us, we often end up in jobs or life situations that we dislike and can't immediately escape. So either we can say, let's put godly stuff on hold for a bit until the God inspired plans are available to us again and sweat out this boring and depressing season as fast as possible. Then, wipe the sweat from your brow, breathe a sigh of relief, and resume the God stuff when possible. Or, we let God to produce these characteristics within us as we endure a rubbish season, recognising the ways he wants to work within us and use us while we inhabit an inconvenient situation. We are wherever we are for a reason, because God is always at work and he wants to shape us into the people we were always meant to be. We miss this if we believe that we can only live meaningfully during the seasons we enjoy. On top of that,

we're well aware that jobs or life situations we want often aren't what we expect anyway. Even when we get what we want, we normally find that it's not perfectly suited to us and problems show up anyway. That's why, as we get older, we calibrate our hopes with our experience and knowledge – there is no materially perfect wonder path which satisfies our deepest needs (even if we really, really enjoy a particular job or life situation).

How can we live like this then?

1. Acknowledge that God is at work wherever you are, and wants to work in you – look at your situation, how can you pursue righteousness within it? Where are the gaps – areas where you're not living for God by faith as you should?
2. Ask why you dislike your situation – is it because your ambitions exclude God? Are your expectations too materially focused? Is your happiness dependent upon your situation?
3. Let God change your desires – as I said earlier, we pursue things based on our desires. If you see that God and his ways are the best thing that could ever happen to you, then you'll want to pursue righteousness and these other things. If you don't it'll all be a duty filled drag which will make you depressed. There's a place for dutifully pursuing righteousness but if it's only ever a duty, it signals that we don't really know God or enjoy him. We'll run out of steam and give up if that's the case. You may sometimes love your friend or partner out of duty, but something's seriously wrong with the relationship if it's only ever a duty.
4. See the eternal perspective – Nothing we do for God is ever in vain, God never fails to see, and even if we don't accomplish much in material terms, living for God leads to an eternal reward. This is in addition to the fact that as we get to know God better and entrust our lives to him, we will enjoy him and his ways. As the passage in 1 Timothy warns a little bit earlier in 5:10, some Christians had gone off track and ended up pursuing material things rather than God, which, even then, brought them a lot of heartache. It boils down to faith in God: do we believe that living for God is ultimately rewarding? If we don't, we need to search him out and listen to him so that our perspectives are corrected before we abandon him for the sake of our own pursuits.

I'm not in the place or season I want to be, I'm sure that with Covid comes many cancelled plans and stalled ambitions. It's basically a truism at this point. I work in a job I neutrally accept, and it's a daily fight to see how God wants to work in me while I remain in this position. I'm pursuing a very different course in life, but I can't put life on hold for a year and just grit my teeth.

My ambition to do a Masters is fine and I have some really big hopes and ideas for life – there is nothing wrong with that. I see ways God wants to work. For example, I see how I avoid taking responsibility for the hardest tasks, not disciplining children because they're hard work, or letting my anxieties get the best of me instead of trusting God in high pressure, difficult situations.

This is my battleground, God is at work there, where is yours?

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This is my battleground,



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