

# God's Purpose for the Church

by Steve Gallagher

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*God's purpose for the church is to bridge the gap between Jerusalem and Caesarea, and to bring people from different backgrounds together to fulfill his great purposes.*

**Duration:** 46:48

**Scripture:** Isaiah 55:8

**Topics:** "Church Growth", "Gods Purpose"

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## Description

This sermon delves into God's unfolding plan for the church, highlighting the significant role of individuals like Saul of Tarsus and Peter in the early church. It explores the divine intervention in bridging the gap between Jewish traditionalism and Gentile inclusion, emphasizing the need for openness to God's new work and discernment amidst deception. The message underscores the importance of seeking the Lord's ways, which are higher than our own, and aligning with His purposes even when they challenge our preconceived notions.

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## Transcript

Okay, today's message is God's Purpose for the Church. Let's open with a word of prayer. Lord, I do thank you that you have condescended to allow us to partake of your great purposes, your great plans that you formed way back in eternity.

And you've allowed each of us to play a part within that plan, that grand plan that was conceived in the sacred halls of heaven before there was one angel, before there was a universe or an earth or man. You created a plan, and we're watching it unfold through this story and acts, a segment of it, an important segment of it, and this morning we're going to see an important segment of it. I pray that you'll make it alive to us today, Lord, that you will open our hearts and eyes, Lord, that we might see into that unseen realm where God is moving his purposes forward.

Thank you, Lord, for sharing these stories the way you did through Luke, this physician of ancient times who acted as a church's historian. Thank you, Lord, for the way you led him to emphasize certain things and to bring out certain things. We pray that you'll just be with us here this morning.

In Jesus' name, amen. Okay, so today we're going to be in chapters 9, 10, and 11. I'll tell you right now it's going to be mostly all chapter 10.

Chapter 9, of course, is when Saul of Tarsus is converted, and we're going to save that story for the next series when we go through his life, but I want to just briefly touch on the impact that this man had not only on the early church, but also on all of the Jewish population of the world, really. If there's one word that could describe this man, before Christ and after Christ, it would be troublemaker. The guy was just a troublemaker.

Everywhere he went, he caused problems. He was just that way. He was involved in the persecution and martyrdom of Stephen, and, of course, he was the driving force behind the great persecution of the church in those early days.

And after he was converted, he stirred up so much trouble in Damascus that the believers there had to lower him down outside of the walls just so he could escape with his life. He goes up to Jerusalem, and he causes so many problems in Jerusalem for the church that they had to take him and stick him on a boat and tell him to go to Tarsus until, you know, you get things worked out a little better or something. And, of course, all the years later, he would be considered an agitator everywhere he went in the Roman Empire.

So we see here in verse 30, they're putting him in a boat, sending him away to Tarsus. And then in verse 31, Luke gives us another one of his summary statements. Now look at this.

This is hilarious to me, really. So the church, so, you know, this is the word so, meaning the reason why this happened, because of everything before it, so the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace. That is just so funny to me.

I mean, you know, if Luke was saying that once he got saved and, you know, okay, he quit persecuting the church, you would think this would have been ten verses before this, when he first came to the Lord. But no, it's like when they put him on the boat and sent him out of there. You know, just please go away, would you? We love you, you're a great guy, but you just got to go now.

And so, you know, they put him in the boat, and they enjoyed peace, and the church was being built up and going on in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase. And, you know, even that's hilarious to me, because I think these poor people had been so traumatized by this guy that they had to send in the comforter to, you know, help soothe them down and calm them down and kind of cover over all the ruffled feathers. Anyway, so that was his story and the impact that his life had on the church there in those early days.

The rest of chapter 9 is basically about the exploits of Peter, and he goes down into the Sharon coastal area there on the Mediterranean, and it tells a story about him healing a paralyzed man and raising to life this woman Tabitha who had died, this believer. But I want to sum up his exploits by this comment from Pulpit Commentary. They said this, We saw something of his ministry at Jerusalem in the earlier chapters of this book, preaching, praying, praising, healing, protesting, resisting, suffering, perplexing his enemies, exhorting and comforting the saints.

We saw him carefully building up the church, baptizing, breaking the bread of life, appointing fresh ministries. We saw him the faithful administrator of the church's discipline, her courageous confessor, breasting the storm of persecution at his post and maintaining the center of Christian unity with his brother apostles at Jerusalem. Then we saw him preaching the gospel in the villages of Samaria, confirming the baptized, rebuking the hypocrite, and returning to the post of danger at Jerusalem, always ready with outstretched hand or speaking mouth or words of prayer to fulfill his ministry and be a fisher of men for

Christ.

Blessed Peter, glorious apostle, great primate of the church, opener of the door to Jews and Gentiles, we praise God for thy mighty works wrought in the name of Jesus Christ. Wow, what a great epitaph on his life that this man wrote. All right, so we're going to look at chapter 10.

Most of our time will be spent here going through this story. And before we do that, I want to step back and take a look at the big picture. I mean the really big picture.

Go back a couple thousand years before this. The world, this was several hundred years after the flood, and the world is rife with idolatry and debauchery, violence. It had just, mankind had gone right back to the way they were before the flood, if not worse.

Things are bad, really bad. And, of course, the polytheistic fertility cults had been birthed there in Babylon. That Babylonian culture permeated Mesopotamia.

But it was there in Mesopotamia that God saw a man and put his hand on that man's life and started dealing with him and called him forth out of Mesopotamia, brought him to the promised land, dealt with him, and promised that he would be the father of a mighty nation. And so he had a son, and then his son had sons. And there, about 2,000 years before the first century, we find that the Jewish nation is really birthed through the 12 sons of Jacob.

And what God was trying to do was instill light into this dark world. You know, it was spiritually, practically midnight. It was dark.

So God decided that he was going to take one man and create a family, and out of that family, a nation, and they were going to be different. They were going to be set apart from the dark world, and he was going to lead them in such a way that they would live a separated life, that they wouldn't be... that their culture would be different than the pagan cultures around them, that he would be able to infuse and impart into their lives a new way of living. And so he brings the lawmaker, I mean, what's the right word? Anyway, Moses, and Moses brings forth the law from the Lord, and so this whole new mindset is birthed on planet Earth.

And right in the midst of all those pagan nations, God created a nation, his own nation of people. And we know the story that they failed horribly. They couldn't even maintain a life in God for themselves, let alone be a beacon to the dark world around them.

So mostly the history of the Jewish nation was failure. And so God sends them to Babylon. Okay, this is what you want.

You can have it. 70 years there basically cured them of their love of idolatry. So they come back to the land.

They get rooted into the promised land again. And only now, instead of them going in the direction of paganism and debauchery and all that, they kind of go the other way, but it's still the self-life. This time it becomes this Jewish exclusive-ism, that they see themselves as better than everyone else.

We don't do those things, you filthy pagans. They got so bad by the first century in this mentality that even if a 12-year-old little girl, who happened to be from an Amorite background or whatever, even if a

12-year-old little girl walked in, they would look at her as something just disgusting. That's what the Jewish nation had become by the first century.

In chapter 10, the two main cities of Palestine are talked about here. At least I'm going to use them to represent these two camps. You have Jerusalem, which represents the Jewish people and their long history of traditionalism and the law and the ordinances and the temples there.

All that stuff is representing what Judaism had become by that point. Then you have Caesarea, which represents the Roman government, the pagan stronghold in Palestine. There's actually temples right there in Palestine, in Jewish territory.

There are temples worshipping these false deities, demons of course, and it is a stronghold, a foothold of the whole Greek culture. It represented everything that was dark during that time. Now they were only 70 miles apart, these two cities, but spiritually speaking, they could have been a million miles apart because they were on complete opposite sides, and yet God wants to bridge that gap somehow.

How's he going to do it? I can tell you this. It would have been impossible before the cross, but once Jesus died on Calvary, it changed everything. Chapter 10 is a huge step in the fulfilling of God's purposes on earth.

It really is very important. We don't tend to put a lot of credence in this story, but if you look at it from the perspective of what God was doing on earth and in the importance of what he was doing, it's very big. In fact, Luke realized it, the significance of it, and that's why he devoted some 66 verses to telling the story.

It's obvious that in his thinking it was very important. All right, so let's read here. We're going to be reading a lot of this chapter, and we'll get at some of this stuff as we go.

Verse 1, now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually. About the ninth hour of the day, he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, Cornelius, and fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, What is it, Lord? And he said to him, Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who was also called Peter.

He's staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea. When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants, and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. All right.

Now I'm going to just make a couple of observations here. The first is, and I almost said something about it as I read it about him, but the first is that without exception, every time the New Testament talks about centurions, it's always in a positive light. There's a number of them that are highlighted in the Gospels.

For instance, the one who asked for a servant to be healed, and Jesus said, I have not found such faith in all of Israel. Wow, what a statement that this pagan soldier, that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, would say that about him. There were others as well.

The one at the cross, who all the other people were oblivious, all the Jewish leaders were oblivious, but he saw it. This certainly must be the Son of God. There were others that Paul would deal with later.

Cornelius is one in a line of a number of centurions who God was able to touch. They didn't have all the religious baggage that the Jewish people carried around, and so if they had a sincere heart, an open heart, he could reach them. Now, Cornelius wasn't really a proselyte.

A proselyte basically was a Greek, a Gentile, who came into the Jewish realm and did everything possible to make himself a Jew. He got circumcised, he went through all the rituals, he learned the law, he just did everything. He took upon himself the Jewish mantle, so to speak, talked like they talked, everything.

He became, in effect, a Jew. That's what a proselyte was like, but Cornelius was not that way. We see here that he was a devout man and one who feared God.

He obviously was a sincere man, and he understood that paganism was bankrupt. It was just a pack of lies, it was a bunch of nonsense. He got that.

He could see that clearly. There's nothing over there, I'm not going over there. But then he looks at Judaism, and he understands somehow, instinctively, that the light, the oracles of God, are within this people group, and yet he looks at the people and he knows things aren't right there either.

Something's not right here, so he didn't go full bore into the Jewish church. He remained aloof from all of that, and yet there was something about it. He understood that they really did serve, so to speak, the great and living God.

He understood that somehow, to some degree. So his life is pleasing to the Lord. What a tremendous thing.

And he was prepared to follow God's will wherever it led him. It didn't matter. It's just obvious in the way that the angel speaks of him and so on.

Now this thing about people outside of the church, outside of all of our formulas and all the things that we attach to Christianity, this is a big thing, because what happens to all these people who've never heard the gospel or whatever? What happens to them, eternally speaking and so on? It's one of the great mysteries of our day, for sure. But Alexander McLaren kind of touched on it, and I like what he said. I'm going to read this quote.

God does not in the least conflict with the truth that, quote, there is none other name given among men whereby we must be saved, but it sheds a bright and most welcome light of hope into that awful darkness. Christ is the only Savior, but it is not for us to say how it may appear to us. Cornelius's religion was not a substitute for Christ, but was the occasion of his being led to Christ and finding full conscious salvation there.

God leads seeking souls by his own wonderful ways, and we may leave all such in his hand, assured that no heart ever hungered after righteousness and was not filled. Yeah, man, that is the truth, and we need to remember that, not to put God in a box of our own making and demand that he does things in a way that fits in with all of our traditions and formulas and all of that. We have to be careful that we don't do that to the Lord and don't demand that of him.

Well, anyway, this is Cornelius. This is the man who's over there in Caesarea and has this tremendous experience with this angel. Now, let's get back to these two cities for a second.

You've got Jerusalem up there in the foothills and with all their centuries of traditions and all of that, but something has happened there. God, because of Calvary, and this is why the Lord was able to do what he did, because of Calvary, because God came down in the form of man and lived and died as a sacrifice, made atonement for sin, and made that connection between heaven and earth, because of that, he was able to create a new race of men. Man, that is tremendous.

He created, right there in Jerusalem, the city that stones the prophets, right there under the nose of the religious leaders, God went right in there and birthed a brand new people. It's amazing. And so, with our city analogy, you've got the walls around Jerusalem, so this remnant, especially represented through Peter, who was the leading figurehead of the church in those days, you see them outside the walls of the city.

They're attached, but they're not in, that Judaism thing. Then come over here to Caesarea, which is the stronghold of paganism, and you've got a man there who's a sincere seeker after the Lord, and he has stepped outside of the walls of that city. He's not part of that.

So you have these two men, Peter and Cornelius, who both have taken a step in the right direction, but there's still a huge gulf between them, and that's what this chapter is all about, is how to connect these two. How God is going to put his hand on each one of these and bring them together to do something marvelous in the accomplishment of his great purposes. So, as we're going to see, it isn't Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, that God uses to bridge this gap, and it isn't Philip, who's living right there in Caesarea, maybe a few blocks away from where Cornelius lives.

He doesn't use Philip. He uses Peter, and it's right. It had to be this way because Peter was the leader.

He was the one person that the church in Jerusalem would listen to. So, anyway, let's see what happens here. Verse 9. On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up, you know, Peter is in Joppa, of course.

Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray, but he became hungry and was desiring to eat, but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance, and he saw the sky opened up and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, Get up, Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.

Again, a voice came to him a second time, What God has cleansed no longer consider unholy. This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky. All right, let me make a couple observations here before we move on.

The opening of the heavens signified the opening of a mystery that had been hidden. Now, we all have gone through the book of Revelation, and this is not new to you guys, but the revelation means the unveiling. It's not something that's off in outer space.

It's something that's in another dimension, or it's a truth that lies right there under the surface that just has not been revealed yet. That's what's happening here. There's some kind of a new revelation coming to man, and the four corners of the sheet just simply represent the four corners of the earth, meaning all of mankind.

Think about it. China, with the millions of Chinese people at that time worshiping Buddha or whatever, and all the other parts of the earth, even that the Roman Empire didn't even reach and control, all of those people are represented in this. And the point of the vision is not ceremonial laws concerning food.

That is not the point. The point of the vision is that God is abolishing all the restrictions that have been placed on Judaism that make them different, these outward ceremonial laws and stuff that makes them different from the rest of mankind. That's what this is about.

And, of course, Peter's response is typical of him. He argues with the Lord. And how many times does he do this? He argues with Jesus about going to the cross.

He argues with Jesus the night Jesus is going to wash his feet. He argues that he's going to be with Jesus to the end. I mean, this is just Peter's nature coming out, and it's typical of him.

And he's so high and mighty in his Jewishness that he wouldn't dare, not even if God himself tells him through a vision, not even for God to tell him is he willing to go against what he had been raised up in. And, man, I tell you something. We all are that way.

We have to be careful of that attitude. And what's his reasoning? I've never done this before. This is new.

This is unheard of. This is out of the box, Lord. You know, what are you asking of me? We don't do things like that.

That's his reasoning. Let me read this Matthew Henry quote. He that made the law might alter it when he pleased and reduce the matter to its first state.

God had, for reasons suited to the Old Testament dispensation, restrained the Jews from eating such and such meats, to which, while that dispensation lasted, they were obliged in conscience to submit. But he has now, for reasons suited to the New Testament dispensation, taken off that restraint, and we ought to make use of it and stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. All right, so, you know, we're seeing here that God is changing, altering his purposes with man.

He is going to reveal himself to mankind in a new way. You know, the Jewish experiment didn't work. He needed to do it that way.

The oracles of God needed to be introduced into the world. So that has run its course, and now it's time to do things differently. Okay, verse 17.

Now, while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what this vision meant, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate. The timing of this is amazing, how the Lord timed all this. I think it's the same angel that did this vision with Peter that was at Cornelius' house the day before or whatever.

But anyway, the Lord timed it all. And so they show up calling out, and they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there. While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, Behold, three men are looking for you.

But get up, go downstairs, and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them myself. Peter went down to the men and said, Behold, I'm the one you're looking for. What's the reason for which you have come? They said, Cornelius is centurion.

They tell him basically what happened. So they stayed there with Peter, verse 23. And the next day, they made the trip back to Joppa.

And they arrive from Joppa and get to Caesarea. And so when Peter enters Cornelius' house, Cornelius drops down to worship Peter, and he says, Get up, I'm just a man just like you. And then he starts telling them about what happens.

And he gives them a sermon about the life of Christ, and here's what the Lord is doing on this earth now. So I'm sure that Cornelius and these different people had heard some of the stories about Christ, this miracle worker, and how the Jewish people had him put to death. And I'm sure Cornelius was like, Man, what's up with that? What is that all about? And so Peter's filling in the details of the things they had already heard.

And he gives them this sermon in verse 43 and 44. He kind of sums it up here. Of him, Jesus, all the prophets bear witness that through his name, everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. Man, that's just amazing. And the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to them, and they spoke with tongues exalting the Lord and so on.

Completely out of the box. You can't do things like this, Lord. This is really throwing off all of our ideas and the way that we have established things.

But that's the way the Lord is. So chapter 11 is all about the brethren in Jerusalem. And they're sitting there smugly, and they've got all life's problems figured out.

They know exactly what's going on. I mean, that's kind of the sense you get. And so Peter's got to bring this story back.

This had to be pretty intimidating to him. I mean, I can't think of a modern-day version of what would be comparable. But he's got to go into the stronghold of Judaism, of the Judaizers that are in the church and have a very loud voice within the body of believers there in Jerusalem.

Unsaved cares within the wheat. That's who they are. And so he's got to go in there and convince them and tell them why he did the things he did.

Let's start with verse 1. Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them. All right, now you remember a few chapters back when it said that many of the priests had come to the Lord.

And I pointed out then this was certainly Pharisees. So there was this whole contingent of Pharisees that were within the church of 5,000, 6,000 people there in Jerusalem, however many it was, and there's a contingent there. It would be just like today.

You have different denominational groups. So this is the circumcision denomination, and this is what they hold to, and this is how they see things, and so on. And so they're represented right there in the midst of this meeting, and they are taking exception to what Peter has done.

But they don't have a problem with him preaching to Gentiles, and they don't apparently even have a problem with Gentiles coming into the church. What is their problem? That he sat down and ate with them. I mean, think about what that means.

You know, this is how bound up they were and how narrow their perspectives of what a relationship with God had meant throughout history that them eating with Gentiles, no matter how hungry for God those men are, how devout, how God-fearing, none of that matters. The only thing that matters is, you know, you ate with these uncircumcised heathens, and that's how they see things. So Peter tells the story of what happened.

And, you know, people can argue with your doctrinal stances, but they cannot argue with testimony. And that's what makes testimony so effective, is when God has done something in your life, for you to be able to give a clear-cut testimony of what the Lord has done, it just tends to silence people. Well, I'm just right now thinking about when I gave my testimony on the Oprah Winfrey show, and you could feel the cynicism in that room.

I can't explain it. You would have to experience it. This is Hollywood at its height, you know, at that time in the 80s.

And, you know, I'm in there, in this den of iniquity, so to speak, against, standing there, you know, just a few feet from me is Oprah Winfrey, one of the leaders in television industry, and she's challenging my life with God and my testimony, but she couldn't stand up to it. She had no argument for it. And that's what you see here with Peter.

And so he basically tells the story, and the bottom line, the theme of his talk with them was, listen, this is what the Lord was doing. Who am I to argue with him? In fact, look here at verse 17. Therefore, if God gave to them the same gift as he gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way? When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, well, then God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.

Isn't that wonderful that he granted to them repentance? That's amazing. He granted to them, it doesn't say granted heaven, he granted faith, he granted repentance because repentance is the door that you have to go through to get into the faith and eventually into heaven. But anyway, so that's what happened.

And apparently, overall, generally speaking, the church was satisfied with this, but there was that contingent that I don't think were satisfied, and as will be obvious later in Paul's life, the way it comes forth, but at least temporarily they're silenced. So the mother church accepts Gentiles into its domain, but now they've got a whole new realm of issues to deal with. How do they deal with all these Gentiles coming into a Jewish religion, which they still saw themselves as part of the Jewish church, so to speak, and they just would have some practical issues that they had to deal with.

What's their lifestyle going to be like? Do they have to live the same way we live? And can we eat with them and fellowship with them? What does all this mean? Because their entire lives, they had been trained in their thinking to think a certain way. And I guess that's kind of what I want to just say a couple things about here wrapping up this morning. In fact, let me just read this pulpit commentary quote.

What frequent proofs we have that God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways. And yet we are always making iron cages in which we think to confine the operations of God's spirit as well as

the thoughts of men, and are surprised when either God or men refuse to be confined within their bars. And man, you see the same thing now.

Actually, you see the same thing all along. You know, you have on one side paganism, the Greek culture that represents people who could care less about God or the things of God. They make no pretense about it.

You know, they're out there with their lifestyle. You see it all around you in this world, you know, on the internet and everything. Godlessness.

And then on the other side, you see the religious world. People who are trying to do it in the flesh. People who are trying to maintain control of things and who have everything boxed up with their traditions that have built up over centuries now, you know.

And so here at the end of time, however close we're getting to it, you see the same dynamic that was there in the first century and the same dynamic that was in Israel, you know. What was it? It was that God was calling people to himself, but generally speaking, those people who were responding were trying to make a religion of their own. Trying to do it their own way so that they could receive the glory, the acclamation, whatever it is.

And, you know, so you have this balance. And the thing that came to me, especially in the end times that we live in, and the great warning from Scripture about the end times is beware of deception. Do not be misled.

You know, this is what's going to be happening. There's going to be a lot of deception, and that deception is what the Antichrist is going to follow into, not only the world power, but also into the church. Beware of deception.

But last week, we saw the deception of Simon Magus. And I want to tell you that the greater deception is the Judaizers in the church because they have partial truth. And they take that truth, and they twist it and corrupt it to fit into man's flesh and to create their own self-made religion.

That is the greater deception. There's a word in the Hebrew. I don't remember what the actual Hebrew word is, but it's translated as simple.

And really, what it means is to be open. And that is the crux of it, the fine line that we have to find. We have to be open enough to receive the new thing that God is doing.

You know, we have to be open and discerning, and be willing to accept what God is doing in our day. And yet, we don't want to be too open to where we just accept without discernment anything that comes down the pike, which is what a lot of the charismatic church is. And really, I could even say it that way.

You have on one side the reform movement, the fundamentalists, and on the other side, you have the Pentecostals and the charismatics. And you go very far in either direction, and you're going to be out of whack. And, you know, I'm just kind of oversimplifying and overgeneralizing here.

But what I'm saying is that if you go too far this way, you end up in rigid formalism and ritualism and man's tradition. You go too far this way, and you're in the devil's power, and, you know, weird things, manifestations, or whatever is happening. The right balance is to be discerning, because you spend time

in the word of God, and yet to be open to what the Lord is doing.

I want to just close it out with what the Lord himself said. In Isaiah 55, he said, Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near.

Let the wicked forsake his way, et cetera. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

And, you know, applying that to this situation, to our lives today, we need to really walk humbly before the Lord. You know, we don't have all the answers, and if God wants to do things different than what we have grown up with in American Christianity, then we have to be open to that and allow the Lord to step outside of the formalism, the box of American Christianity that seems like it's all so perfect in our finite minds and in our narrow viewpoint. But if God wants to do something different, we've got to humble ourselves and submit to it and say, yes, Lord, you do things as you wish.

You know, none of us has the corner of the market on God's thinking. So, Lord, we do pray that you would give us that kind of discernment to hear your voice, to sense what you are doing, to align ourselves with your purposes, your plans, not our own preconceived notions, but to stay right in the center of the flow of your purposes. This is a day where deception abounds on every side, and there's something in our flesh nature that is attracted to one form of deception or another.

Lord, I pray that you'll help us all to recognize the deceptions that appeal to us and see them for what they are, whether it's from the formal side of things or the informal side, whether it's Simon Magus and people like him who are working in the enemy's power, or whether it's through the Pharisees and their legalism and all of that stuff. Lord, give us eyes to see and ears to hear and to be aware of what you are doing and to avoid being misled in any way other than yours. And we thank you for being with us this morning.

In Jesus' name, amen.

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Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/LXq06Pw5D88.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/steve-gallagher/gods-purpose-for-the-church/>

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