



## **Searching for Purpose Do You Have a Top Priority for this New Year?**

Hundreds of years ago, one of the biggest celebrities of his era was someone known as the black knight. Zavisha, whose flowing black hair and custom made black armor made him stand out in any tournament, was known as the most gifted and skilled knight of his age. Participating in countless numbers of tournaments, he never lost a dual and out of 1500 knights, he won the tournament of Buda in 1412. A renowned orator, Zavisha was rich, famous, and desired by women all over Europe. He was the guest of kings and queens, dukes and barons. In the battle of Grunwald in 1410, Zavisha defeated every knight he faced on the battlefield. He was known as a man of honor and charisma, self-discipline, and great courage. In 1428 Zavisha led a cavalry of 500 men, fighting for king Sigismund of Luxemburg against the army of the Turkish Muslims in the Siege of Golubac. King Sigismund believed the only way his army could survive was to retreat across the Danube River. Zavisha and his men were protecting the back of the fleeing army. As nearly all the men had made it across the Danube, Sigismund ordered Zavisha to go back also but the Black Knight refused, determined to continue fighting alongside his men. A special boat was sent just to get him, but Zavisha would not leave the battlefield. Zavisha fought on until he was the last of the cavalymen still alive. Dozens of Turks fell by his sword. It was only after his horse was shot out from under him and the Black Knight was surrounded by the Turks that he finally died.

Zavisha paid the ultimate price for his loyalty to his comrades in arms. He could have easily lived out his years in comfort as one of the most beloved men in all of Europe, but he had a purpose in life that superseded all other possible options for how to live. Another way to look at purpose is loyalty. Who or what matters most to you? One of the most famous declarations of loyalty was boldly proclaimed by a poor widow of Midian. After her husband died as well as her father-in-law, Ruth's mother-in-law decided to leave the foreign land of Moab and return to her hometown in Israel. Ruth refused to be left behind. Despite the fact that it meant leaving her own country, relatives and friends, Ruth insisted that she would go with Naomi. When Naomi tried to convince her to stay in Moab, Ruth would not hear of it. Her response to Naomi resounds across the ages as one of the great pronouncements of loyalty ever made. **But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."** (Ruth 1: 16-17 NIV) Ruth was determined to live by a set of values that superseded comfort and ease. Ruth decided that no matter what, she wanted to be with Naomi to the very end. That sort of loyalty is rare. I have a friend who quit her job so that she could be with her dying sister her last few months. It is a purpose in life, this sort of loyalty. We are in it together and I will not abandon you no matter what. Purpose is much more than a set goal, an accomplishment pursued. It is a reason for being; an overarching direction in one's life.

The Apostle Peter famously insisted that he had that kind of purpose. When Jesus announced to His disciples that He would soon be leaving them, Peter wanted to know where Jesus was going. The Lord told him and the others that they wouldn't be able to go with Him but later they would be back together. That is when Peter made His infamous declaration of loyalty to Jesus. **Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."** (John 13: 37 NIV) Jesus' response was a stunning prophetic word.

He let Peter know that the Apostle before the rooster crowed would three times deny being associated with Jesus. Peter convinced Himself he had a specific purpose in life and that was absolute loyalty to Christ. This would later be the case but not then. He was still without purpose and his loyalty was tested by Satan. Jesus shared a parable that illustrates this condition. Two sons were each told by their father to go work in the vineyard. The first said he wouldn't but then changed his mind and did so. **"Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.** (Matthew 21: 30 NIV) One young man found his purpose and decided where his loyalty was and the other was purposeless and his loyalty undecided.

Purpose is what decides the sort of life you will develop. Until you determine your loyalty, you will have no purpose, no direction. That does not mean you won't do anything. You probably will do countless numbers of things. But you will have no purpose in your life. From ancient Korea comes the tale of a young woman who was desperate for help. She heard of an old hermit who was able to put together magic potions and she wanted one to regain her husband's love. When she told him what she needed, he laughed. "Are all the world's problems solved by magic potions?" It seemed like he would not do anything for her, so the young woman told the hermit that her husband had been loving and kind before he went to war for three years but since he returned from the battleground "he hardly speaks to me and when he does he is grumpy and demanding and nothing pleases him". "I see" said the hermit. "I can make a potion for you, but I will need the whisker of a tiger to make it work." Yun Ok went home and spent hours trying to think of a strategy for plucking a whisker from a tiger. Finally she came up with a plan, knowing full well she was risking her life to somehow gain back her husband's love.

One night, after her husband fell asleep, Yun Ok slipped off to the mountain where a tiger was known to live. With a bowl of rice and meat broth in it, she gently called out to the tiger. He never came out of his cave so eventually Yun Ok returned home. Each night, the young wife followed the same procedure, always getting a bit closer to the tiger and his cave before calling out to him. Eventually she got to within a stone's throw of the cave and gently invited the tiger to come eat the food she had for him. This time the tiger poked his head out of the cave and the two stood staring at one another in the moonlight. The next night the tiger got so close to Yun Ok that she was able to whisper softly in a soothing voice to the tiger. The following night the tiger gazed probingly into Yun Ok's eyes for a long time and then ate the food she had for him. Night after night this relationship developed, and Yun Ok was able to softly stroke the top of the tiger's head. Six months Yun Ok and the tiger met each other in front of the cave until Yun Ok got up the courage to ask the tiger, "Oh generous and kind Tiger, I beg of you to let me have one of your whiskers. I desperately need it!" Then she snipped off one. The tiger did not get angry, as she feared. When she left, Yun Ok ran home with the precious whisker clutched in her hand. The next day she raced up to the hermit's house and presented him with the tiger's whisker. He looked carefully at it to make sure it was authentic and then causally tossed it into the fire. Aghast, Yun Ok screamed! "What have you done? What about my magic potion? The hermit gazed up at despairing Yun Ok and told her she didn't need the whisker or a magic potion. "But how will I gain back the love of my husband", she cried. "Whatever you did to gain the trust of the tiger, do that and your husband will love you back", he reassured her.

Yun Ok made a mistake. She thought her purpose was to get a tiger's whisker. That was not it at all as the hermit showed her. Yun Ok's purpose was to gain a happy and fulfilling marriage and those are two different things. What is your purpose in life? It starts with loyalty. What or who is at the center of your life. What drives the decisions you make and who determines the sort of day you will pursue? You decide your object of loyalty. No one can figure that out for you. Joshua famously told all Israel as he was leaving his service to them as leader that they could be loyal to whoever they wished. They could serve whatever God they chose but he made it clear to them, **"But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."** (Joshua 24: 15d NIV) Abraham, after his wife Sarah passed away, went to the Hittite people to purchase a plot of land that had a cave which could serve as Sarah's tomb. He told them what he wanted, and they addressed him as a "prince of God". Why did they give him that title? It is because over the years, it was

clear to all who knew him that Abraham's chief purpose in life was to be completely loyal to God no matter what. What would those who know you best say is your chief loyalty? Is your purpose in life what you want it to be? Have you considered how it would be if like Abraham and Joshua and Ruth you chose God to be the center of your life? Give this careful thought! Your decision will determine the sort of life you carry with you into eternity.