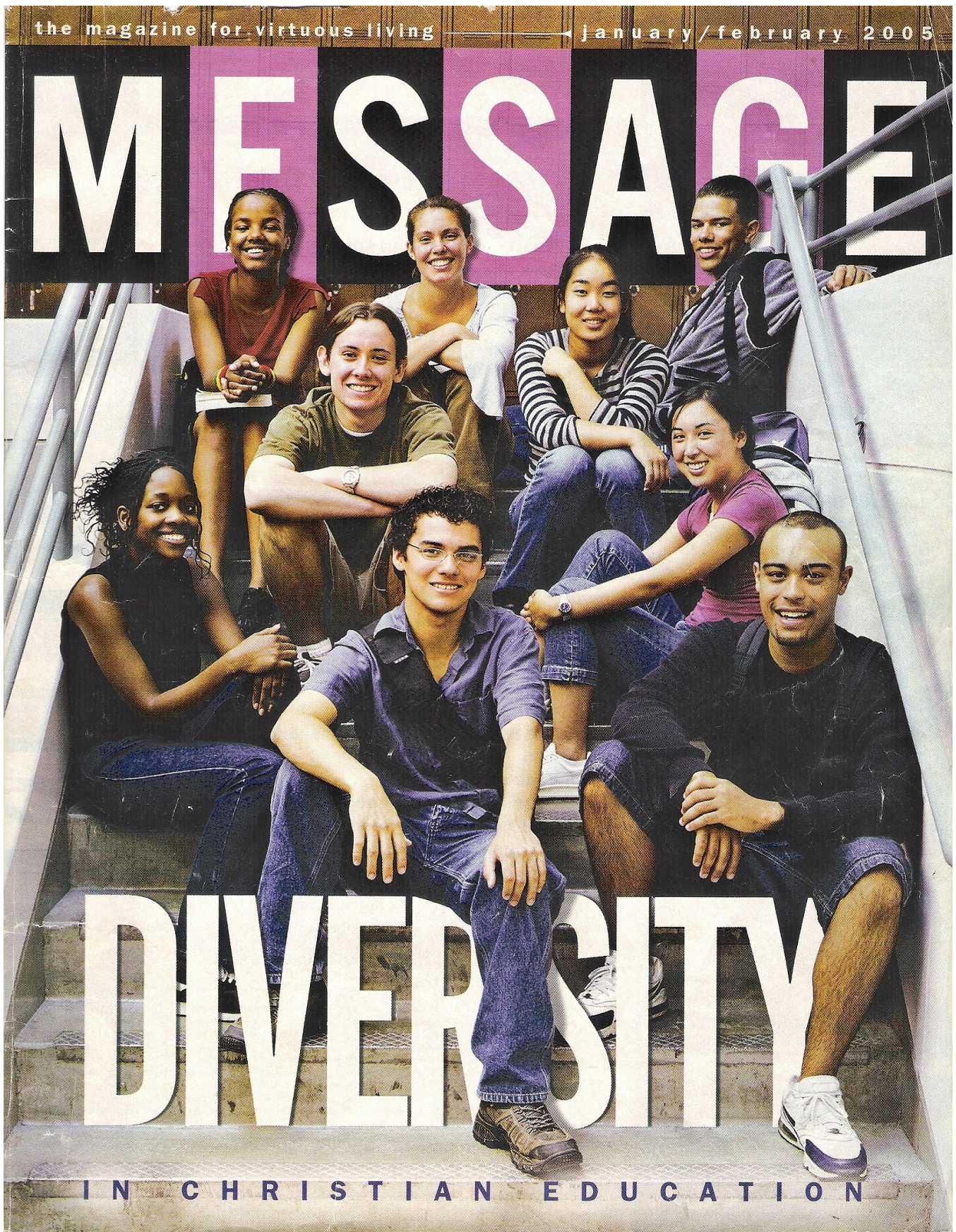


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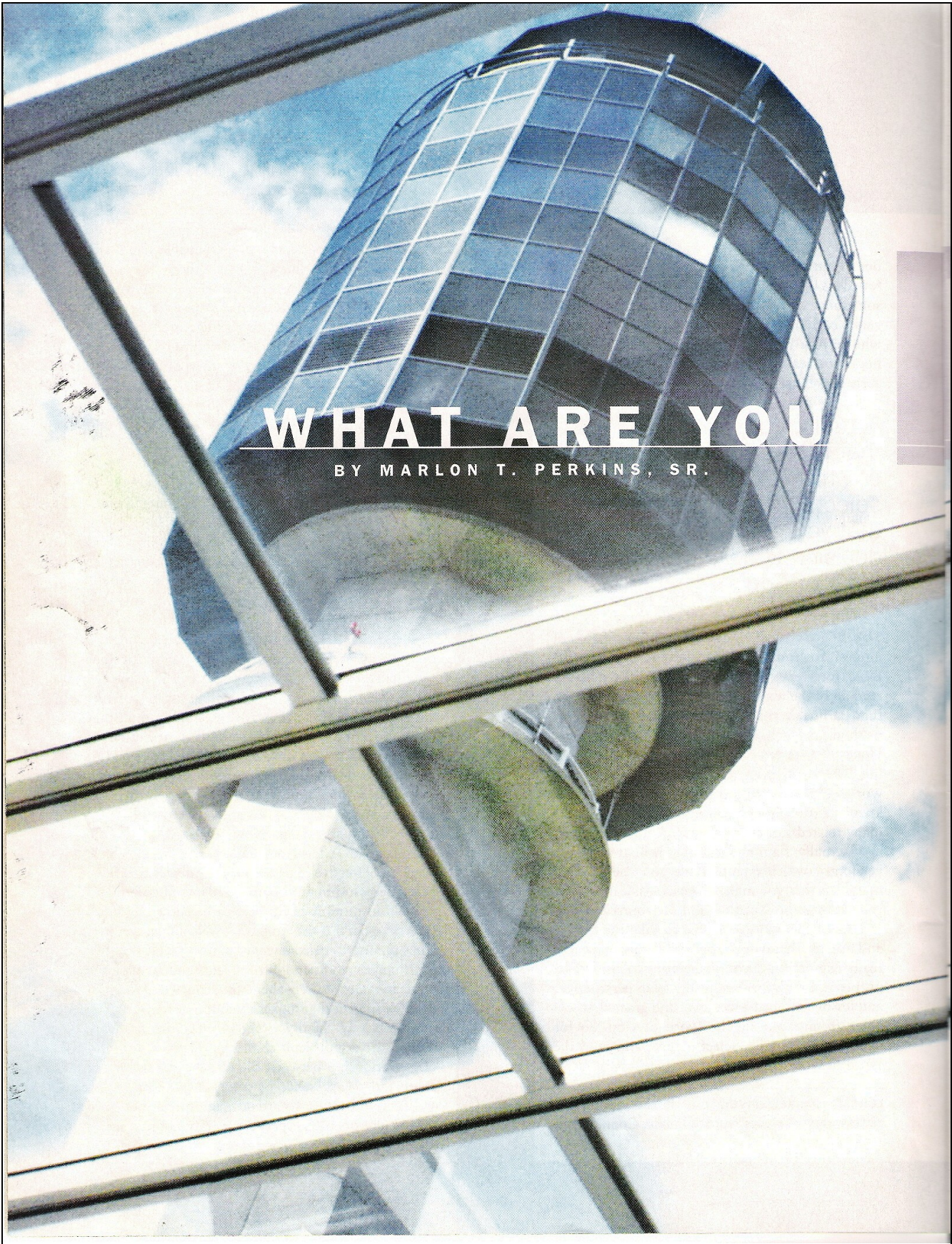
MESSAGE



DIVERSITY

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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WHAT ARE YOU

BY MARLON T. PERKINS, SR.

“AS YOU KNOW, I HAVE BEEN VERY FORTUNATE IN MY career, and I’ve made a lot of money—far more than I ever dreamed of, far more than I could ever spend, far more than my family needs.” The speaker was a prominent businessman at a conference near Oxford University. The strength of his determination and character showed in his face, but a moment’s hesitation betrayed deeper emotions hidden behind the outward intensity. A single tear rolled slowly down his well-tanned cheek. “To be honest, one of my motives for making so much money was simple—to have the money to hire people to do what I don’t like doing. But there’s one thing I’ve never been able to hire anyone to do for me—find my own sense of purpose and fulfillment. I’d give anything to discover that.”¹

This poignant illustration makes a compelling point—purpose has power. There is a longing in the human spirit to find purpose in life. “We all want to know why we are here,” writes author Caroline Myss. “What is our mission in life? Those people who know it, are easy to spot, their lives shine with meaning. Their perception of their life’s purpose gives them the strength to live through the rough times as well as to enjoy the good. Many people, however, are confused—or completely in the dark—about their reason for living.”²

A great mass of people awaken every day to a purpose as prodigious as beating the time clock at work and as voracious as keeping up with their favorite soap opera. There has to be more to life than this!

There is more. It can be found in living what I call a “purpose-full” life. This is no typographical error—it is intended to awaken within you a new way of thinking about your life. I am a firm believer that to live with purpose is to live on purpose. Do you sometimes feel as if one of the biggest things you’re missing in life is a clear sense of direction and purpose? Worse yet, would you even know where to begin looking for that purpose and direction? Here are three things that I believe can help.

1. *God [already] has a purpose for your life.* God will reveal His purpose directly to you. He will speak through another person, a sermon, a book, or life experience; whatever the medium, the message will be clear to you.

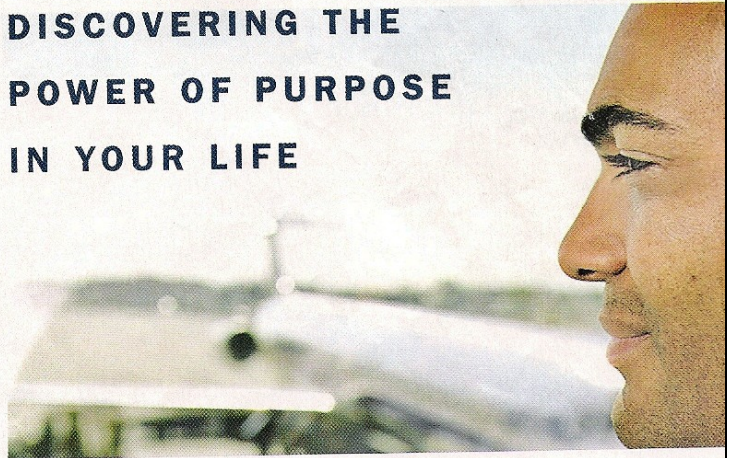
One of the most stirring revelations of God’s purpose for an individual came to the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah in his call to the prophetic ministry. “The Lord spoke these words to me: “Before I made you in your mother’s womb, I chose you. Before you were born, I set you apart for a special work. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:4,5, New Century Version).³ Notice the use of the word “before.” What a powerful notion—to think that God has a prearranged plan for your life which, if followed faithfully, will not only glorify Him, but also bring you the greatest sense of personal fulfillment imaginable to the human senses. Mother Teresa is reputed to have once declared, “I was born to serve God’s poor.” Do you know what you were born for? It is your greatest privilege and most urgent task to seek God’s pur-

pose for your life, no matter how humble or insignificant it may appear to others—or yourself. Said one author, “every calling is great when greatly pursued.”

2. *God has a place for you to serve.* Every year a group of men and women leave their jobs and homes and enter Andrews University Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Their purpose is to pursue two-and-one-half years of ministerial training for a career in vocational ministry. If they are not sponsored by a church entity, the thoughts of where they will serve, and therefore be paid upon completion of their studies, increases in intensity with each passing semester. Sadly, some of them succumb to the pressure of uncertainty—uncertainty over future employment—and thus pursue other things. They have lost sight of one critical truth: if God has a specific purpose for your life, then He has a specific place for you to fulfill that purpose. As He told Jeremiah, “...I appointed you as a prophet’ (specific purpose) ‘to the nations’” (specific place).

3. *God promises to guide you in fulfilling your purpose.* In her book, *Sacred Contracts: Awakening Your Divine*

DISCOVERING THE POWER OF PURPOSE IN YOUR LIFE



Potential, Caroline Myss shares a personal account that I think profoundly illustrates this point. She writes, “Over the past eighteen years . . . I have had a series of related dreams that all revolved around one consistent image: an airplane taking flight. The first dream featuring this airplane occurred in 1982 when I was at a tremendously low point in my life. Just a few years before, I had been getting increasingly disillusioned with my work as a journalist. Then one day I was given an assignment to cover a workshop on death and dying by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. The level of suffering in that workshop, and the astonishing way in which Kübler-Ross was able to help people devastated by the death of a loved one, inspired me to return to school to study religion and mythology. But the postgraduate degree in theology that I earned didn’t help me find my niche any more than my B.A. in journalism had. Two years after leaving graduate school, I was struggling to find a clear direction for my life. Working as a secretary in the Department of Pharmacology at Northwestern

University, I could not figure out where I was going.

“I felt as if I were living on a pendulum that was oscillating between worlds. My spiritual studies lifted me up, but then I was swung back to earth and the panics and fears of ordinary life, and I became stuck in a deep depression. After months of this dark time, I reached the point at which I said to a friend, ‘I’ve got to do something. A part of me is dying, and if I don’t do something soon, I will die.’” I meant it.

Then I had a very unusual dream. I was the only passenger in a small but high-powered jet plane. My plane was still on the ground, idling in what looked like a stall in a barn that held a number of other planes in similar stalls. Each of the other planes took off in succession, as they were meant to, but my plane continued to wait for permission from the control tower. I grew angrier by the minute. Finally, I relayed a message to whoever was sitting in the control tower, Hey! What about me?

“Turn your motor off,” came the reply. “We’re holding you until the skies are safe for your journey.”

My plane was in a stall just as I was stalled physically, emotionally, personally and professionally. Yet, the control tower, which to me, even in the dream represented God, sent the message that I was cared for and watched over. Still asleep, I became saturated in the feeling that God was in His Heaven and all was right with my world.

When I awoke from that dream, I was content to wait for my appropriate time of departure. I lost my desperation to find a concrete direction for myself. Every part of my life looked different from that moment onward. I was being watched over; there was a plan for me that was already in motion behind the stillness and frozenness of my external life.⁴

No matter how daunting circumstances may appear in your life, God is still in control. He promises to see you through!

It is no surprise that people spend a lot of money on books, seminars or life coaching in an effort to discover the meaning and essential purpose of their life. In a similar manner, we as a nation spend billions of dollars annually in space exploration, seeking incessantly to find that missing link to human life.

Are you confused or disappointed with the purpose and direction of your life? I offer you the true missing link, “Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee” (Job 22:21, KJV).

MARLON T. PERKINS, SR., is pastor of the Philadelphia Seventh-day Adventist Church, Des Moines, Iowa.

¹ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), p. 1.

² Caroline Myss, *Sacred Contracts: Awakening Your Divine Potential* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002-2003), p. 1.

³ Scriptures quoted from *The Everyday Bible, New Century Version*, copyright © 1987, 1988 by Word Publishing, Dallas, Texas 75039. Used by permission.

⁴ Myss, pp. 31-33.