

WHAT ON EARTH AM I HERE FOR?

The Purpose Driven Life – Week 1

1

Welcome to 40 Days of Purpose. Today we start our 40 day spiritual journey.

We begin by considering life's three greatest questions:

- (i) the question of existence – why am I alive?
- (ii) the question of significance – does my life matter? and
- (iii) the question of intention – what is my purpose?

2

We are clearly not the first to wonder why we are alive.

3

Thousands of years ago, the prophet Jeremiah asked the same question. “Why was I born? Was it only to have trouble and sorrow, to end my life in disgrace?”

In all likelihood, there have been many times when you have felt this way too. Deep in the troubles of this life we might rightly ask whether this was all we born for. Were we born just to have a bunch of problems? Were we put on this planet just to have heartache, grief and stress?

A guy named Dr. Hugh Moorhead, who is the Head of Philosophy at the North Eastern University, in America, once wrote to 250 well-known philosophers, scientists, writers and intellectuals and asked them, “What is the purpose of Life.”

Some offered their best guesses, some admitted they had made up a purpose for life and others were honest enough to say they were clueless. In fact a number asked Dr. Moorhead to let them know if he discovered the meaning of life. Carl Jung, the famous psychiatrist said, “I don't know the meaning, the purpose of life, but it looks as if something were meant by it.” Isaac Asimov, the science fiction writer, wrote, “As far as I can see, there is no purpose.”

These are depressing statements, because a life without purpose isn't a life worth living.

Where then shall we find our purpose?

We could try the Mystical approach. The mystical approach says “look within, and find your purpose within.” Of course, if that really worked, most people would know their

purpose. I expect most of us, perhaps subconsciously, have tried this approach many times. We reflect on who we think we are and if we can see a purpose there.

There seems to be a rise in pseudo-spiritual TV programmes, particularly in the US. People tell their experiences, the hosts promise spiritual understanding but in the end they tend to be saying you've got to figure it out yourself.

Alternatively, we could try the Philosophical approach – there are many philosophical interpretations of life:

- The Survivalist says, “The purpose of life is just to stay alive.” Basically, your job is just to live as long as you can.
- The Naturalist says, “The purpose of life is just to perpetuate itself.” In other words, you're just here for biological reasons. Rap artist, Ice T, wrote, “The only reason we're here is to reproduce. Just chill out and reproduce. Keep the species alive.”

Doesn't that make you want to jump out of bed in the morning? It may make you to jump into bed, I dunno.

- The Hedonist says, “The purpose of life is pleasure – have fun, party hard. Do everything you can, experience everything you can. The water of life is adrenaline.” I think I thought like this before I met God and I know many of my friends still do.
- The Materialist says, “Life is about the acquisition of things.” Your life is measured by the things you own. I have a friend who said to me that when he becomes a successful accountant with all the trimmings of success, then he would be made. Then he would be a real man, I think he said. I have another friend who told me life is all about money. He told me the purpose of life was just to get more money.

The emptiness of this kind of purpose distresses me. He who dies with the most toys, still dies.

Philosophy does not give us very satisfying answers to our question.

What about the 'Self-Help' approach. What do the mountain of self-help books in Waterstones tell us? They all basically say the same thing: “You've got to invent your purpose.” You've got to create your own purpose in life. And they all give the same basic approach – discover your dreams, go after your goals, have some ambitions, dream big dreams, aim high, believe you can achieve, figure out what you're good at, never give up, involve other people. Now, this actually good advice and, if you do those things, you will be a success. But being a success and knowing your purpose in life are not the same thing. You can be a raving success in life and still never know, “What on earth we are here for”.

Why are we alive? Why do we wake up each morning? Why are we here today?

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You have heard of King Solomon. God gave Solomon wisdom surpassing all other men. Solomon understood that “The Lord has made everything for His own purpose.” Sun, Moon, Stars, Earth, Seas, Plants, Animals, You and Me. Everything means everything. John’s gospel begins by declaring that “all things were made through God and without God nothing was made that has been made”. Everything has been made by God.

Since everything was made by God, Solomon knew everything had been made for His purpose. Nothing is without purpose. Every rock has a purpose, every plant has a purpose, every animal has a purpose and, if you’re alive, you have a purpose. If you want to know if God still has a purpose for you, check your heart. If it’s beating, God still has a purpose for you here on earth. In fact, God has 5 purposes for your life: Worship, Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry and Evangelism. Over the next 40 days, we will look in detail at the 5 reasons God put us on this planet.

Today, we are focusing on God’s motive. The earth was not made for our purpose. God made everything to fulfil His purpose. Life is not about us. It is about God. So, the meaning of life is far greater than our personal fulfilment. It’s greater than our own happiness, even our own peace of mind. We were made by God. And we were made for God. And we were put on earth for God’s purposes. Until we understand that, life will not make much sense.

5

Paul wrote this, read it with me...“Long before He laid down the earth’s foundation, He had us in His mind and settled on us as the focus of His love to be made whole and holy by His love.” Notice the phrase “the focus of His love”. If you only remember one thing from today’s service, remember this, God says: He made you, to love you. God made you to love you.

6

You might want to write that down. You were created to be loved by God.

God is love and God wanted to create creatures to love - so He created you. God didn’t need you. He wasn’t lonely. God is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit so he shares love and fellowship within himself. That is why we can say “God is love”, rather than just “God loves”. But God’s love is great, greater than any of us have ever imagined. Because of His great love, He made you. Even before he made the earth, he had you in mind. He chose us to be the focus of his love and to be made holy by his love. God made you in order to love you.

Before we can talk about anything else, we must understand this is what we are here for – to be loved by God. To the question of existence – why am I alive, God answers saying, “I made you to love you, that’s why you’re alive.”

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The second question of life is Significance. Does my life matter?

8

2,500 years ago, the Prophet Isaiah asked this question. He said, "My work all seems so useless. I've spent my strength for nothing and for no purpose at all."

This is the attitude of existentialism. Existentialists, like Camus and Sartre, came to the conclusion that there is no purpose to anything. The result of this conclusion is very depressing indeed. If you don't have a purpose, life is confused, empty, meaningless and very depressing. But we were made for a purpose. Our existence has significance.

[Probably the greatest, atheist philosopher of the last century, Bertrand Russell said, "Unless you assume the existence of God, the question of life's meaning and purpose is irrelevant." You see, if there is no God, if you're just a freak chance of nature, you're just complex pond scum – then guess what? – your life doesn't matter. If somebody wants to take it, they could. Because there's no real reason, meaning or purpose.]

During World War II, prisoners at a certain Nazi concentration camp in Hungary, were made to process human sewage. But the allied forces bombed the sewage works so the prisoners had nothing to do. The Nazi soldiers had the prisoners take all the rubble of the sewage works and move it into an adjacent field. The next day, they had them take the same rubble back to the site of the sewage works. Day after day they were forced to move the rubble back and forth between these fields. After some time, the prisoners began to go crazy. They lost their will to live, because there was no meaning or purpose in moving bricks to and fro. So, they threw themselves in front of the guards in an attempt to get shot.

You and I were made to have a life with meaning.

There are perhaps three levels of living in the world. The lowest might be called Survival. The Survival level is where most people live. They are just barely getting by. They're just existing. They are controlled by their circumstances. They put in their time, and live for the weekend. They're not living. They're just surviving.

A level up from this might be called the Success level. Probably, this is where *most* of us are. By the world's standards, you're pretty sorted. You're comfortable, compared to most of the world. And you're extremely wealthy, compared to the rest of the world. You have possessions, you have freedom, you have good health and you may have status. Some of you are quite successful. But this is not living to the full. Success, possessions and status will never fully satisfy.

We need to move up to the next level of living, which we might call Significance. More than Survival, more than Success, Significance. It is a false humility to think it arrogant to think we are significant. Three things can give us all Significance:

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#1: Knowing how much you matter to God

#2: Knowing the meaning of life and God's purpose for your life.

#3: Living out God's purpose for your life.

These things give us significance.

If you want to know how much you matter to God, reflect on scripture.

10

God says, "I am your Creator. You were in My care, even before you were born."

God was caring for you even before you were born. He was thinking of you, loving you and protecting you and you weren't even born yet. **11** The next verse says, "You (talking about God) scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in your book." That's how much you matter to God. He pays so much attention to you that every detail of your life was in his mind, before you even took a breath.

12

King David praised God saying "You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made". I was on the bus on Friday looking at people of every nationality around me. They all had different expressions, troubles, dress, characters, attitude and status, some were bonkers! But they were all wonderfully made.

Fearfully made is a figure of speech, it is not meant to be understood literally. It suggests God made us with great care and intensity. Our birth, our bodies are a miracle. And, more than that, they are wonderful. Einstein said that, if there not enough evidence for God in the world, he could find enough in his own thumb. We are the pinnacle of God's creation. God made us fearfully and wonderfully.

Do we matter? You not wrong! God made us. He considered everything in your life, the good, the bad and everything in-between. And then he made you. You matter to Him.

And He has extremely long-range plans for you. As we saw earlier, God had us in mind way back before he made the earth. His plans are ancient. And they are

unchanging. God is omniscient, all knowing, he does not change his mind. **13** Look at the psalm, “God’s plans endure (what?) forever; His purposes last (what?) eternally!!”

Eternity.

Before I came home for the weekend I made a to do list. I was a little disheartened to find it ran to nearly two pages of A4. But those plans won’t last me till Wednesday. God’s plan covers eternity.

The purposes we’re going to consider in the next 40 days are not just for the rest of your life on earth, they’re for the rest of your life for ever and ever, and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever..... Because God’s purposes are eternal.

As Julio said last week, the only one of our 5 purposes we can’t practice in heaven is evangelism. I suspect there may be other purposes to replace evangelism but the first four will remain. We were made to worship God, to enjoy fellowship with God and each other, to grow in the likeness of Christ and to serve God and each other. These things you practice on earth you’re going to do forever and ever. Earth is the warm-up, the kindergarten, the preschool, the dress rehearsal.

God has plans and purposes for your life, but they don’t end at death. When you die, your heart will stop and that will be the end of your body. But its not the end of you. You’re much more than a body. You were made to last forever. **14** You might want to write this down, God says, “I was made to last forever.”

There is more to life than this! One of the best ways to waste your life is thinking all there is, is here and now. The 60, 70, 80 or 90 years you spend here is a drop in the ocean compared to eternity.

Realizing that life is preparation for eternity, is the key to the meaning of life. **15** The Bible says, “When this tent we live in – our body here on earth – is torn down. God will have a house in Heaven for us to live in. A home He himself has made, which will last forever.”

You want to know how much you matter to God. Well you matter so much to God that He wants to keep you with Him for eternity.

To the question of Significance – does my life matter, God answers “You matter so much I made the world for you, I made you carefully and wonderfully as the pinnacle of my creation and intend to keep you with me for ever”.

16

The third question of life is Intention: What is my purpose?

What on earth am I here for? This is the focus of our next 40 days.

17

King David asked this question, “Why did you create us? For nothing?”

God made you for a reason, for a purpose. And the only way you’re going to know your purpose is by looking to Him.

Let’s play a little game.

18

Anybody know what this is? What is the purpose of this tool? Its not a hammer. Its a kinetic bullet puller. “It will allow you to safely remove the bullet and powder charge from a loaded gun cartridge.”

19

What about this? What would you do with this? It’s an apple, corer, peeler, slicer. Amazing.

What’s the point I am making?

If you don’t know the purpose of the tool you are likely to abuse it. Why are so many people in the world being abused, because we don’t understand our purpose. We use each other and ourselves wrongly, abnormal use, abuse. Because, we don’t know our purpose. That’s the first point.

The second point is that the only way you’re going to know the purpose of things is either (a) to talk to the creator, or the inventor, of it, or (b) read the owner’s manual.

We won’t find our purpose in life by listening to philosophers because even the best ones are just guessing. We won’t find our purpose within and we won’t find it in self-help books, because they just say create a purpose. If you want to know you’re purpose, you’ve got to talk to your Creator and look in the owner’s manual. It’s the only way you will ever know your purpose in life.

How does the manual begin? Genesis 1:1, “In beginning, God (not in the beginning, you) created.” It all starts with God, it continues with God, it ends with God. He is the Alpha and the Omega.

If everything started with God then it makes sense to start our search for purpose with God. **20** Read this next verse with me, “For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible...everything got started in Him and finds its purpose in Him.”

21 As I said last week, “It is in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for...part of the overall purpose He (that’s God) is working out in everything and everyone.”

If you want to know your purpose in life, start getting to know God. The more you know God, the more you’ll understand the ways and the wisdom of God and so the more you’ll understand the meaning and purpose of life.

22

In fact, the more you know God, the more you’ll understand everything. As King Solomon observed, “knowing God results in every kind of understanding.” If you want to understand the meaning and purpose of life your will find it in God. If you want to know anything your will find it in God. God is the creator of everything and all wisdom is in his hands.

23

You might want to write this down, we find our purpose by getting to know God.

Nowhere else will you learn your purpose in life. Only in getting to know God. It’s not about you, its all about God.

God has explained that, in same way the “the heavens are higher than the earth, so his ways are higher than our ways and his thoughts are higher than our thoughts”.

How can we get to know him if his ways and thoughts are so much higher than ours. Well getting to know God does take time, that’s why we have eternity to do it. But God understand our ways and thoughts for he came and lived amongst us, fully man, Jesus Christ. So God can meet you where you are at. But we won’t just have a good think and then, sorted, we know God.

We have begun 40 days of getting to know God. This is an intentional spiritual journey but it is the start of a long journey, not the whole journey. To understand our purpose, and anything else for that matter, we will only do it by developing an ongoing and eternal relationship with God.

I realize we are at different stages in our spiritual journey. This doesn’t matter, we’re going to take this journey together.

- Perhaps you are a seeker, you’re not sure you buy any of this God stuff but you realise the need to check it out. We’re glad to have you with us.
- Maybe you’d class yourself a new believer. That is great because you’re going to get to start your Christian journey right, like many of us did not.

- Perhaps you're a "stumbler." You think of yourself as Christian but know you're not very close to God. And you've been living for your own my plans and not God's." This 40 days is the time to come home.
- Some of you are strong believers. If you commit to this journey you're going to go deeper with God than you've ever gone before and bring others along too.

24

This last verse speaks to us wherever we are at. "It makes no difference who you are or where you're from – if you want God and are ready to as He says, the door is open." (Acts 10:35)

It's not too late. George Herbert once said, "It's never too late to be who you might have been."

25

Lets pray

Let's bow our heads – You know God had a purpose in bringing you here today. He wants you to know Him and He wants you to know His purposes for you. So talk to Him. You don't have to use any fancy words. If you don't know what to say, just follow me in this prayer...just go "Me too, God".

"Dear God, I realize that if it weren't for you, I wouldn't be alive. But because you made me, you must have a purpose for me. I admit that I focused on my plans for my life, not yours. But I want to know your purposes for me, so I commit the next 40 days of my life to learning about it. Thank you that you made me so you could love me. Thank you that you cared for me even when I didn't know you. Thank you that I was made to last forever. I want a life filled with meaning. I want to start by getting to know you better. So as best as I understand, I ask you, Jesus Christ, to come into my life and help me to understand your purposes for me. I want to take the first step today. In your name I pray, Amen."

[Is God playing games with us? Is God intentionally trying to confuse us? Does He keep us in the dark so we don't know why we're here? Is that His plan? No, not at all. God wants you to know how much you matter to Him. God wants you to know the meaning of life. He wants you to know His purposes. And He's done a lot to help us understand them, as we shall see over the next 40 days, we're going to talk about that.]