

Now and Forever 6-8-03

(from chapters 3-7 of The Purpose Driven Life)

Whether we realize it or not, there is a driving force in every one of our lives. We are all motivated by something. What is driving your life? What guides and directs your days? It can be any number of things, necessities, deadlines, fears, envy, or an unconscious belief. Conditions, emotions and personal values can drive you.

Guilt drives some people. Guilt causes us to avoid God and sabotage our own success. We are products of our past, but guilt enslaves us to our past. Freedom from the driving force of guilt can only be found in the forgiveness of the cross. *"What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven."* Psalms 32:1 (LB)

Others are driven by resentment and anger. Bitterness has taken root, it controls their thoughts and emotions, causing them to replay a painful event over and over, scaring ever deeper their wounded heart. Resentment causes some to clam up, while others choose to manifest it by blowing up. Resentment always hurts you more than it does the one who wounded you. When you refuse to let go of the offense, you allow the person to continue to hurt you. For your own sake, learn the lesson and let go. *"To worry yourself to death with resentment would be a foolish, senseless thing to do."* Job 5:2 (TEV)

Many are driven by fear. A tragedy in our past, an abusive relationship, even a genetic predisposition can cause us to yield to fear. Fear is a self-imposed prison that keeps you from venturing out and experiencing all that God has for you. The Bible says, "Fear not!" more than any other command I can think of. Fear must be overcome by faith in God and His love for you. *Where God's love is, there is no fear, because God's perfect love drives out fear. It is punishment that makes a person fear, so love is not made perfect in the person who fears.* 1 John 4:18 (NCV)

Materialism can drive your life. Does he who dies with the most toys win? Maybe he wins a lesson in being misguided, but that is about it. The funny thing about materialism is it continually demands more of you. The nice car must be washed and waxed, the toys must be maintained, and you feel you are wasting them if you don't get out and use them. Someone once called a boat a hole into which you throw money. I don't mean to offend any boaters, but if you have a boat you know what I mean. The bigger our collection of goods, the more time it all demands of us. The more you make, the more you spend. The more you make, the more you think you need to make to have enough. Some of the happiest people I've met were the poorest in the third world. The Bible tells the elders to remind those who are rich in this world not to be arrogant or to trust in uncertain riches (1 Timothy 6:17). You see, the more we possess, the more we depend on those things for security, and in many cases, the haughtier we become. Jesus said that you can't worship both God and money. Only one can rule your life. Here is another reality check from Solomon. *The more wealth people have, the more friends they have to help spend it. So what do people really gain? They gain nothing except to look at their riches.* Ecclesiastes 5:11 (NCV)

Commented [notes1]: 17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.
1 Tim. 6:17 (NIV)

Others are driven by the need for approval. Parents, employers, and peers are just a few of the people we try to please. When they tell us we are special and give us words of encouragement, we feel we are of value. The problem is, they are often judging our success by the world's measurements or what benefits them personally and not God's standard. Trying to please people is a trap that is hard to escape from. What pleases some won't please others. Pastors know this better than anyone. I can preach to please man or preach to please God. I could get my 'atta boys' every Sunday if that drove me. If you are going to live for the audience's applause, make it an audience of one, God. He said, *No one can serve two masters.* Matthew 6:24 (NIV) Would you rather have His approval or that of your peers? Which opinion matters in eternity?

Let me ask you, what would your friends and family say drives you? These driving factors we have mentioned are not only shortsighted; they lead to an unhealthy life. This life is not all there is! Certainly the driving force of our life should be connected with our eternal purpose. Otherwise we may find ourselves at the end of life, finally at the top of the ladder, only to find we've placed the ladder against the wrong building.

So what is God's revelation to us of life on earth? The Bible gives us three metaphors that tell us our Creator's viewpoint: a test, a trust, and a temporary assignment. We see the test over and over in the lives of the characters in the Bible. Some passed their tests in outstanding ways. We read about them in Hebrews chapter eleven. Others failed their tests. Some characters passed some and failed some. With every test God provides the ability to pass. ¹³*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.* 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV) Listen to the promise to those who stay strong during the tests: ¹²*When people are tempted and still continue strong, they should be happy. After they have proved their faith, God will reward them with life forever. God promised this to all those who love him.* James 1:12 (NCV) If you think about it, you can probably remember a recent test from God. You might be going through one right now. I am.

The second metaphor is that life is a trust. ¹⁷*Every good action and every perfect gift is from God.* James 1:17 (NCV) Every ability and every good asset is from the Creator. *What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if all you have is from God, why boast as though you have accomplished something on your own?* 1 Corinthians 4:7 (NLT) He has invested life, and ability, and careful planning into your existence. What have you done with it? ²*Now in this way those who are trusted with something valuable must show they are worthy of that trust.* 1 Corinthians 4:2 (NCV) At the end of your life you will be rewarded according to what you did with all that God entrusted you with. Every little thing you do has eternal implications! Take a moment today to consider some of the greater things in your life that God has entrusted you with, and how you are handling those things.

The third metaphor is that life is a temporary assignment. Listen to these words that the Bible uses to describe life: *a mist, a fast runner, a breath, and a wisp of smoke*. I just got a letter from a friend with a picture of his children who were graduating from High School. My first thought was – “When did they grow up!” The older you are the more you realize how fast it goes. If we are going to start doing the purposes God has for us and for this group of believers we had better get at it. “*LORD, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered, and that my life is fleeing away.*” Psalms 39:4 (NLT) If we are going to make the most of our time here we must realize how brief our life is and that all we see is temporal. *The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever.* 2 Cor. 4:18b (Message)

Have you ever stayed somewhere for just a few weeks? You know you are leaving soon so you don't really settle in. You don't even unpack all your things. Your not staying here for long folks, so don't get too attached. Here are some Biblical terms for our visit to planet earth: *alien, pilgrim, foreigner, stranger, visitor, and traveler*. That is God's perspective of your life on earth, and it should be yours. It's not about now! My wife has a green card that reminds her that her citizenship is somewhere else. We should all have a green card for planet earth. ^{19b}*All they think about is this life here on earth.* ²⁰*But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.* Phil. 3:19-20 (NLT) ¹¹*Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul.* 1 Peter 2:11 (Message) “*You will not be in heaven two seconds before you cry out, 'Why did I place so much importance on things that were so temporary? What was I thinking? Why did I waste so much time, energy and concern on what wasn't going to last?'*”

This life is a dress rehearsal, a staging area, like preschool, it's a tryout for eternity. It's the practice workout before the game, a warm up before the race begins. Sir Thomas Browne said our life on earth is, “but a small parenthesis in eternity.” Abraham Lincoln said, “Surely God would not have created such a being as man to exist only for a day! No, no man was made for immortality.” The Bible calls this body a tent but the one to come is referred to as a home. ¹*We know that our body--the tent we live in here on earth--will be destroyed. But when that happens, God will have a house for us. It will not be a house made by human hands; instead, it will be a home in heaven that will last forever.* 2 Corinthians 5:1 (NCV)

Eternity that awaits every person has only two destinations. C.S. Lewis said, “There are two kinds of people: Those who say to God ‘*Thy will be done*’ and those to whom God says, ‘*All right then, have it your way.*’” This life is a preparation for the next. Last week we focused on the fact that it is not about me. This week let's consider that it's not about now. When you start to grasp that this life is a blip on the screen compared to eternity, your focus has to shift. The life that lives with eternity in mind will look at much of what we get upset over as insignificant and unimportant. What do life's little irritations mean to a soul that is about to step into eternity? An eternal perspective will affect how you see everything. “*The closer you live to God, the smaller everything else appears.*” Your values completely change. Relationships

and character become increasingly important, and fame, wealth, and fun slip into the background.

Short-term thinking is a tool of Satan that has had great success with in our contemporary society. *"To make the most of your life, you must keep the vision of eternity continually in your mind and the value of it in your heart."* If you have surrendered to the love of Christ you are on your way to ETERNITY, where you will be reunited with your loved ones, free of all pain, rewarded for your faithfulness, and reassigned to a work you will be thrilled to do.

Sooner than we all can imagine we will stand before God. Then you will realize that life was not about this time on earth but is just a prelude to eternity in His presence. Standing there before God, we can surmise from the Bible, you will be asked two basic questions. Fortunately God wants us to have the right answers so He gave us the answers in the Bible. *"What did you do with my Son, Jesus Christ?"* It won't be about your doctrinal views, or which church you attended, or even your occupation. It will only matter whether you have placed your trust and hope in Him or not. If you have, it will have changed your life, and that brings us to the second question.

"What did you do with what I gave you?" God keeps books. He is merciful but He is also just. His heart's desire is to reward and bless and enjoy you in heaven. There has to be something in your short life He can base that reward on. Salvation was accomplished by Jesus on the cross, but your rewards have to do with how you invested your life. Did you say, "yes" to the Holy Spirit? Jesus gave us examples of this question when He said, "You fed and clothed the poor, and visited the sick and those in prison", and in the parable of the talents He praised and rewarded them according to their obedient investment. God has invested His Holy Spirit in you as well as gifts of the Spirit. Are you letting them be used? It will all come back to what you allowed to be your driving force. Since life is a test, a trust and a temporary assignment, how did you handle the test? How did you deal with the trust? Did you see your earthly life as a temporary assignment, or not?

Since you were made to last forever, what are you passing up today that you know deep inside the Spirit of God wants you to do? He wants you to do it because He wants to bless you in eternity. On the other hand, what should you stop doing in light of eternity? *This world is fading away, along with everything it craves. But if you do the will of God, you will live forever.* 1 John 2:17 (NLT)

This morning I ask you to consider what is driving you. In light of the reality of God's word and His revelation of what your life is about, are you on track? Most of us would give a so-so answer. On a scale of 1 to 10 we'd give ourselves a 5. When you step into eternity you have the first answer down. You have trusted Christ to save your soul; at least I hope that is true of everyone here. But when it comes to the second question, *"What did you do with what I gave you?"* many of us hesitate, because we aren't truly living in the light of eternity. Our driving force is a mixture of things instead of the clear-cut desire of loving God with all our heart.

Only the life of Christ in you can help you change your focus and help you live in the light of eternity. Most people will never look beyond here and now. Most will never realize deep in their heart that, "It's not about me and it's not about now." Will you take this challenge from the Holy Spirit to move beyond the ordinary and take hold of the reality that it is all about God and His eternal glory? *³⁶For everything comes from God alone. Everything lives by his power, and everything is for his glory.*
Romans 11:36 (TLB)

With that perspective we will do much better when it comes down to the final test. When we are asked what we did with what was invested in us, we will be able to say that we found our purpose was to glorify God and we lived in the light of eternity. Jesus' response of, "Well done good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord", will fill our hearts to overflowing.

In the weeks to come we will be looking at the ways the Bible says we can glorify God. You can go on being driven by something other than God's purpose for your life, but why would you want to? You have the opportunity of a lifetime, literally. You can invest in eternity. The words of Jesus tell us the foolishness of letting something else drive us and the reward of letting His eternal purpose drive us. He said, *"Anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let go,...you'll have it forever, real and eternal."* John 12:25 (MSG)

It's not about me. It's not about now. It's all for His glory!

A change in the driving force of life does not just happen because you realize the need. It must come from your earnest desire and cooperation with the Holy Spirit. It takes a real commitment, but also a realization that nothing short of the power of Christ in you can bring it to pass. It has to be more than a passing fad. It must be a continual surrender of your life to the One who gave His life for you. Will you pray this morning for the grace of God to enable you to make this life changing decision and stick with it until you are home? He promises to supply what it takes if you are serious about it. *³Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God.* 2 Peter 1:3 (Message) Will you take Him up on it?

A man and woman will be on the front row to pray with anyone who needs prayer, or who would like to make this commitment in prayer with another person this morning.