

Your Purpose 6-1-03

"Knowing God's purpose for creating you will reduce your stress, focus your energy, simplify your decisions, give meaning to your life, and most important, prepare you for eternity." In the weeks to come, I want to share with you some quotes and Biblical ideas presented in Rick Warren's book, The Purpose Driven Life. (All quotes are from that book unless otherwise noted) The Lord taught me a valuable lesson in regard to this book. I had read Mr. Warren's other book, Purpose Driven Church, years ago. It seemed to me he was presenting the direction the Lord showed him as a program to follow to success. A number of churches have gone through major struggles because they tried to apply a God given guideline for Saddleback Community in another area. God has a unique plan for each place in which He is at work. If there is a program or pattern to follow, it is to find God's leading for your specific area. It is that simple! Seek God and do what He leads. God has a plan for Sedona. Yet seeking Him to find His heart demands dedication and commitment, to press into God until He has enough of you to show you what His plan is. That is what I intend to do right here at this church. Let's pray and ask God to show us the unique plan He has for Wayside Chapel in Sedona, Arizona.

A friend called me and asked if I had read The Purpose Driven Life. I was thinking, "Oh no! First it is cookie cutter churches, now cookie cutter Christians." But my friend went on to share how it had changed his way of thinking and deepened his commitment to the Lord. I was so encouraged at his comments that I decided to buy a copy. Shortly after that, I saw a copy on sale at Sam's Club. Then I knew it was God. (That is a joke)

As I began to read, I was impressed with the clear Scriptural presentation of The Purpose Driven Life and felt led to share some of the lessons with you. I encourage you to get a copy. It is laid out as a 40-day commitment to understand our purpose, one subject per day. Whether you are a seasoned saint or a seeker this will help you get a hold of the fundamental truths from which to steer your life. I won't cover it all, and I'll probably take several of the ideas per Sunday as the Lord leads. So here we go.

The first major counter-cultural claim of the Bible is this; it's not about you. Man has this self-centered way of thinking. That comes with our human nature. When we start to consider our purpose for being, we immediately begin thinking about our uniqueness or talents. The fact is, very few of us will ever be famous for anything. If it is about being someone special in man's eyes, your chances are very slim. How many famous people can you name from 1000 years ago? 5000? In time, all will be forgotten. What does it matter how famous you are if you are completely forgotten? What purpose is there in that? Purpose isn't found by looking within. There are some clues, but to really know for sure, you have to

look to the Creator. The Bible says, *it is God who directs the lives of His creatures; everyone's life is in His power.*

We tend to start looking for meaning at the wrong starting point – self. We look for our own hopes and dreams, but that is not the starting point of the Bible – God's revelation of truth to man. The Bible starts with God – in the beginning God! Listen to Colossians 1:16 from the Message version. *For everything, absolutely everything, above and below visible and invisible... everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him.*

God is the starting point. If I'm to find out why I was created I have to begin with the fact that it's not about me. Look at the person sitting beside you and tell them, "It's not about you." That blowing sound is our ego deflating. Man is the only animal you can pat on the back and his head swells up. It's not about me! It is all about God.

The famous atheist, Bertrand Russell, said, "*Unless you assume a God, the question of life's purpose is meaningless.*" He is coming to the only honest conclusion that can be reached. If we are a product of chance, then there can be no meaning. The only meaning you could derive is continuing your particular genetic strand. Dr. Hugh Moorhead, a philosophy professor at Northeastern Illinois University asked 250 prominent philosophers, writers, scientists and intellectuals to share what they had found to be the meaning of life. Most admitted they did not have a clue. Others gave their best guesses. Many admitted they were just making up an answer. Unless you assume a God, the question of life's purpose is meaningless.

Self-help books are full of the world's backward way of thinking. They often suggest finding your purpose by looking deep within, by defining your values and expressing your goals. That might be helpful in achieving success in the eyes of other men, but if that success is not connected to the purpose for which you were created, it is ultimately a waste of time. This kind of worldly achievement has us chasing our tails, running ever faster to accomplish more than the next guy. Overloading our schedules only distracts us from our real purpose. If you focus on your God given purpose, you may find yourself doing less as you concentrate your actions on being in sync with God's plan.

Trying to find that purpose by looking within is starting at the wrong point. This is trying to use God to fulfill self. "*You were made for God, not vice versa, and life is about letting God use you for His purposes.*" That means that we must look to God for a revelation of our purpose. The revelation of our purpose is found in the Bible. If you want to understand the purpose of an invention, ask the inventor. If we are to ever discover why we are here, we must look to the revelation of God, our Creator. He hasn't left us without an answer. The Bible, the most widely translated and distributed work ever written, contains the answer to the purpose of man.

God is more than the starting point of our life; He is the source of all life. *It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.* Ephesians 1:11-12 (Message)

Did you catch the three insights into our purpose in those verses?

1. Our identity and purpose must be found in a relationship with Jesus Christ.
2. God was thinking of you, planning the details of your life, long before you were conceived. He had plans greater than any you could dream of for yourself.
3. His plans for you fit into His overall purpose. You are not just your own little destiny apart from others; you fit into a glorious design.

Andrei Bitov, a Russian novelist, grew up under an atheistic Communist regime. But God got his attention one dreary day. He recalls, "In my twenty-seventh year, while riding the metro in Leningrad I was overcome with a despair so great that life seemed to stop at once, preempting the future entirely, let alone any meaning. Suddenly, all by itself, a phrase appeared: Without God life makes no sense. Repeating it in astonishment, I rode the phrase up like a moving staircase, got out of the metro and walked into God's light."

You might be able to relate to Andrei. Your life seems to just flow from one necessity to another without any real sense of purpose or higher meaning. If that is how you feel, realize there is a glorious purpose for your existence. Walk up into the light and see that God is the source of your life! He has a plan for your life. *Everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him.* Colossians 1:16b (Msg) It's not about me! We are bombarded everyday with advertising that tells us that it is all about us, but life is about living for God not self.

That reality might tend to make you feel insignificant, but when you realize that God has been thinking of you, planning your part in His grand design for ages, suddenly, we sense a great importance in our part, a great honor to be His handiwork. You are not an accident! Your parents may think you were, but God has never thought that. In times of despair you may have thought it would have been better that you were never born, but the One who made you never thought that. He desired to create you. He deliberately chose every detail of your physical being. You probably have features you don't like. God planned them. He planned your natural talents and lack of them. He designed your unique personality. ¹⁵*You saw my bones being formed as I took shape in my mother's body. When I was put together there,* ¹⁶*you saw my body as it was formed. All the days planned for me were written in your book before I was one day old.* Psalms 139:15-16 (NCV)

God chose the day of your birth and the day of your death. He planned where you'd live and the people you'd meet. ²⁶*From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.* Acts 17:26 (NIV)

Everything in your life has purpose and design. Now you don't feel quite so insignificant! We find we do have great importance, not because we are something, but because the great God who planned the details of our lives is so awesome, so concerned about the details of our lives. Nothing in your life is arbitrary. There is purpose in everything!

Now get ready to hear a truth that will change your attitude about God and your purpose for existence. *Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love,* Ephesians 1:4a (Message)

God's motivation for creating you – not you plural – you singular – was His love! How important are you? ¹⁸*God decided to give us life through the word of truth so we might be the most important of all the things he made.* James 1:18 (NCV)
You and I were created to be objects of the great love of God, the most important of all the things He made.

God is love. He doesn't just express love – His essence is love. He was perfectly complete in Himself throughout eternity. He didn't have a need to create you, but He chose to create you to express His great love. It is not about you and yet, you are not an accident. You are valuable because you are a creation of Almighty God. You are special because He has set His love upon you. ^{3b}*I have carried you since you were born; I have taken care of you from your birth. ⁴Even when you are old, I will be the same. Even when your hair has turned gray, I will take care of you. I made you and will take care of you. I will carry you and save you.* Isaiah 46:3b-4 (NCV)

If you can accept this truth that God has declared in His word, your circumstances, both the happy ones and the difficult ones, take on eternal significance. They then have purpose and meaning that are not detrimental but purposeful. They all then have something to do with God's love for you, even the painful ones. If we know there is meaning, and that the purpose has something to do with the love of God, we can endure hardship and trials. The happy times also take on a deeper significance, because we know that they are even deeper than we see on the surface.

"There is a God who made you for a reason, and your life has profound meaning! We discover that meaning and purpose only when we make God the reference point of our lives." Listen to the Message paraphrase of Romans 12:3 *"The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us."*

Russell Kefler sums it up in this poem:

You are who you are for a reason.
You're part of an intricate plan.
You're a precious and perfect unique design,
Called God's special woman or man.

You look like you look for a reason.
Our God made no mistake.
He knit you together within the womb,
You're just what he wanted to make.

The parents you had were the ones he chose,
And no matter how you may feel,
They were custom-designed with God's plan in mind,
And they bear the Master's seal.

No that trauma you faced was not easy.
And God wept that it hurt you so;
But it was allowed to shape your heart
So that into his likeness you'd grow.

You are who you are for a reason,
You've been formed by the Master's rod.
You are who you are, beloved.
Because there is a God!

Is there something about your personality, history, or physical appearance you are struggling to accept? Consider that it has something to do with God's great love for you. You are not an accident. Albert Einstein was correct when he said, "God doesn't play dice." God didn't just randomly throw your mom and dad's DNA together and see what would come out. God never says, "Whoops!" in spite of what you feel at times.

No, life isn't about you, but neither are you an accident. Your life has eternal significance, and God has planned it so. We are here for God's purposes. In the weeks to come we will delve into the purposes God has for our lives as revealed in Scripture. It will give us the direction in which to fix our sails. It will clarify our decision making process. It will simplify our lives and focus us on what is lasting.