

Finding Purpose for Your Life

If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; they loose their way. But when they attend to what God reveals, they are most blessed. (Proverbs 29:18 - The Message)

So many people have no practical direction for their lives. Why do I get up every morning? What is the point of my life? That is probably the most important question anyone could ever ask themselves! So why is it that we very seldom consider this? Are we afraid of the answer? Or are we afraid there is no answer? Why are you here? Not here in church, but why are you here on the planet; taking up room, using up the air, consuming resources? It may sound crude but maybe it's a pertinent question. I suppose, what I'm trying to get across is this - **"What is the real purpose of your life?"**

When would you consider addressing this issue? Is it only the kind of thing you think about when you leave school or university? Or, if you've ever had a serious health crisis, did you pause to ask this "ultimate" question? And even if you did, soon after, you get caught up in those day to day activities and lose sight of the very **purpose** you discovered. Surely, you don't want to stay so busy that one-day you look up and your life has passed you by. ***"For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"*** (Romans 14:17). The psalmist said, ***"Lord, You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of Your presence and the pleasures of living with You forever"*** (Psalm 16:11).

I wonder whether the disciples and those close to Jesus had ever asked themselves this poignant question, ***"What is the real purpose of my life?"*** Maybe if they had they may have responded differently when Jesus was taken away and crucified. Let's imagine what might have happened to Peter and company after the resurrection:

- Nathaniel probably mended every fishing net they had and was about to go next door and see if the neighbours had some he could mend (John 21:2).
- Martha had almost scrubbed a hole in the floor (Luke 10:40).
- Cleopas had lost all the weight he put on over Passover because he had walked the fourteen miles back and forth to Emmaus every day hoping to run into Jesus again (Luke 24:18).
- Mary had been seen constantly hanging out at the cemetery (John 20:1).
- Thomas never left the house because he was afraid he'd miss Jesus again if He came back (John 20:24).
- Peter spent most of his time sleeping. Then, one day, he'd had enough sleep so he announced, "I'm going fishing" and everyone began grabbing their equipment to join him (John 21:3-12).

All this uncertainty was getting them to act crazy. They had spent the last three years with Jesus. Every day was a new adventure, and there was always something exciting to look forward to. So when He died they were devastated. He was their reason for living. He was why they got up every morning. He was their **purpose** and their destiny. When Jesus died life didn't seem to make sense any more.

However, in the short time since Jesus had appeared to them, after the resurrection, it seemed like He was indeed alive! But now what? How does one follow a resurrected messiah? Jesus wasn't there every morning to lead them, teach them, challenge them, and inspire them. He was alive, but it wasn't the same! Before, they didn't have to worry about how to spend their days, because Jesus took care of that. Now, they had to

find direction and **purpose** for themselves. Maybe they should have prayed the psalmists prayer, *“Lord, show me the way of life, granting me the joy of Your presence...”*

One moment Jesus was there, the next He wasn't. They'd be eating, and suddenly, there He stood. It didn't seem to matter if the doors were locked or not. Walking along the road, suddenly there He was! Whenever they encountered Him, He always knew what they'd been saying or doing. It was as though Jesus was there all the time - an unseen presence. This was a reality they did not yet understand. Finally, in this discouraging situation, Peter decided to go fishing (**John 21: 1-12**). Fishing he understood. Fishing he could do! He wasn't sure about being a disciple of someone who wasn't physically present, but he did know how to fish. And he wanted a catch!

Maybe that is why we stay so busy doing the things we know how to do. Perhaps, if we fill our time, we won't have to examine who we are and how we should live. I believe God created each and every one of us with a distinct **purpose** in mind, and our lives are wasted until we discover that purpose and begin to fulfil it. That is not to say that people who fish for a living are wasting their lives. For **purpose** isn't all-spiritual. What is true for fishermen, is also true for doctors or lawyers, teachers or preachers. If what you are involved in is merely a way of avoiding to do what God created you to do. That is, if you are filling your days with much activity, but missing God's **purpose**, then you are wasting your life.

Peter & Co. went fishing. Maybe, they were trying to avoid the implications of living with a **risen** Christ. It's one thing to follow Jesus when it might bring influence, visibility and success. That all made perfect sense; they had hitched their wagon to Jesus' rising star expecting that when He became “the Messiah” they would become rich, powerful and important. But if Jesus' reign was to be “spiritual”, well, there might be more mileage in fishing (in doing their own thing). So... They went fishing. But Jesus still wouldn't go away! After all, that's where He had found them in the first place. Jesus is nothing if not persistent. He didn't scold them for going back to familiar ways or for trying to avoid Him by filling their lives with other things. In fact, Jesus helped them **succeed** in what they were doing.

Imagine how they must have felt. First they failed as disciples; now they were failing as fishermen. Then, Jesus comes along and they catch 153 fish (the specific number of fish is a clue that the author was an eyewitness). This was a first hand account of what can happen to you when Jesus comes into your vocation - where you are at present. Whether you are an engineer, accountant, manager, or truck driver, your life takes on new **purpose** when Jesus comes to work with you. I love the attitude of a woman who, when asked, *“What kind of work do you do?”* She replied, *“I am a disciple of Jesus, cleverly disguised as a clerk.”* She had a Clark Kent revelation! A Clark Kent revelation is this... Whenever the miraculous is needed, you can step into your phone booth and come out as Superman or Superwoman! That is exactly what God wants to do with us, and with our lives. It is a partnership of the best sort. Your theology becomes your biography. And this can't happen when you are at church. It must happen when you are fishing or filing, or home building.

As Christians, the deep **purpose** of our lives must extend to every area of activity. And our purpose must also extend beyond the boundary of our own existence. Martin Luther King said, *“You ask why are we here, and I will tell you. We are here to serve. Success is not defined by the number of servants you have, but by how many people you serve.”* According to a parable Jesus told, only a fool thinks that the purpose of life is gaining more and more. Our generation has certainly proven His analysis to be correct. The most certain

formula for misery is to have, as your only purpose for getting up each day, that which brings gain/promotion to "self". If you can summarise the **purpose of your life** with the words "me" and "mine" then you have succeeded in sentencing your soul to 'hell on earth'. Not necessarily the hell of eternal fire, but the hell of a shallow, vain, and meaningless existence.

Look at the great lives that have made this a better planet:

- What if Beethoven had just been an organist?
- What if Thomas Edison had just been a mechanic?
- What if Florence Nightingale had just been a nurse?
- What if Mother Theresa had just been a nun?

The people we call great are those who have enriched the lives of others. You and I can be great, but only if we accept that God's purpose for our lives goes far beyond the boundaries of 'self'. Jesus made sure that His discouraged disciple's fishing expedition was very productive - and very successful (John 21:1-14). Notice they had more than they could eat for breakfast; they had enough to share. Notice too that Jesus took some of the product of their own labours, to feed them. Jesus will use some of the produce you have just produced to bless you with.

Jesus provided for their needs by blessing the labour of their hands. And Jesus blessed them so they had more than enough to share. Imagine the stench of 153 fish if they had tried to keep them all for themselves, and you may have an idea of what some people's lives sometimes smell like to God. The American pilot Elmer Bendiner, in his book *The Fall of Fortresses*, describes a bombing run he made in World War II over the Germany: *"Our B-17 was barraged by flack from the Nazi anti-aircraft guns. That was not unusual, but on this particular occasion they hit our petrol tanks. Later, on the ground, I began to reflect on the miracle that the twenty-millimetre shell had pierced our tanks without causing us to explode in the air. I went to our crew chief to ask if I might have the shell for a reminder. The chief explained that there was a lot more to this than I thought. As it turned out there was not one shell but eleven. Any one of them should have blown us out of the sky. He went on to explain that they discovered the shells were all dummies. Each shell was empty except one that had a piece of paper in it. Someone had written in Czech, 'This is all we can do for you right now'."* Those Czech resistors may not have felt their lives had much **purpose** since the Nazis had taken over. But for one group of workers what they had done meant everything. It meant life to the crew of an American B-17.

You and I may never be Mother Theresa or Rick Warren but we can all live as cleverly disguised disciples of Jesus, and that may make all the difference in the world for someone. During World War II, our country desperately needed more coal. Winston Churchill called together the leaders of the miners to enlist their support. He asked them to picture in their mind that day when victory was at last won. There would be a great parade which would pass before Buckingham Palace. The naval heroes who kept the sea lanes open would all pass by; then the brave soldiers who landed at Dunkirk or defeated Rommel in Africa; then would come the pilots who against great odds fought off the Luftwaffe. *"But then,"* Churchill said, *"perhaps last of all, would come a long line of sweat-stained men and women, their faces black with soot. Someone might cry out from the crowd, 'Where were you during the war?' and from a thousand parched throats will come the answer: 'We were deep in the earth with our faces to the coal for England'."*

Perhaps you can't be Mother Theresa or Rick Warren but your life can have **divine purpose** if you go forth

from this place as ordinary looking men and women who are **cleverly disguised as disciples of Jesus.**