

**WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?  
A PURPOSEFUL LIFE  
FEBRUARY 17, 2013**

Do you ever have one of those days when you feel sort of listless,  
like you have no purpose in life?  
Days when you feel useless?  
It's a common enough feeling for which there's a nice collection of sayings.

I feel about as useless as  
a bucket without a bottom.  
As useful as a grave robber in a crematorium.  
As useful as a one armed trapeze artist with an itchy behind.

I'm as much use as mud flaps on a tortoise.  
As much use as a trap door on a lifeboat.  
I'm as useless as rubber lips on a woodpecker.

Everybody has a day like that now and then.  
But some people go through life feeling like that.  
At least when they stop and think about it they feel that way.  
But they may then keep themselves too busy, their lives too noisy, to stop and think.  
Some people decide there really is no purpose to life.  
It's just something we make up as we go.  
How empty.

How many people are searching for that elusive purpose,  
because they know deep down that finding the right purpose gives life meaning.  
They wander from one pursuit after another,  
dabbling here and there,  
but never knowing if "This is it; this is what I was made for."

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a clear cut sense of purpose for his life  
He said,  
"Even if they try to kill you,  
you develop the inner conviction that there are some things so precious,  
some things so eternally true that they are worth dying for.  
And if a person has not found something to die for,  
that person isn't fit to live!"  
Even if they try to kill you.  
How prophetic his words turned out to be.  
And how true about inner convictions and purpose making life worth living....  
And worth dying for, if need be.

When someone asks you, "What difference does it make that you're a Christian?"  
you can tell them, "My faith tells me what my life's purpose is."  
Pastor Rick Warren opened his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, with a very short but very pointed sentence.  
Do any of you remember it?  
"It's not about you."  
The purpose of life is, first and foremost, not about you.  
It is about God, the one who made you and gave you life.

So, what might the Bible suggest God has in mind for us?  
Actually, I talk briefly about this in our membership class.  
So I'll take that outline and expand on it today.

First of all, when people wonder about the purpose of their life,  
 they almost always think of “what am I supposed to do.”  
 Which results in living life as a human doing,  
     not a human being.

The Bible starts in a very different place.

It’s not about what you can do;  
     it’s not really about you at all.  
 It’s first and foremost about God.

The single most foundational purpose for our existence is to be **loved by God**.

In the writings of the prophet Jeremiah, God says to his people,  
     “I have loved you with an everlasting love.” (Jer. 31:3)

There are dozens of times in the Bible that God says to his people,  
     “I love you.”

And the ultimate expression of his love for his creation was in Jesus.

    Jesus who came from heaven to earth, to love us.

    Jesus who died on the cross,

        to pay for our sins.

    Love that willingly gave all,

        for our sake.

    Jesus who said, “No one has greater love than this,

        to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (Jn.15:13)

God did not create you because he needed you.

    God is God, and he does not need anything or anyone.

    Whatever he creates is not out of need.

    He didn’t even create you because he needed someone to love.

    Within the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit there is love,  
         the most perfect, divine love.

    He created you because he wanted to extend that loving community;

        he wanted someone to love outside of himself.

    He wanted to love you.

And everything else flows from that.

Have you chosen to receive his love?

    Do you live each day in the light of that love?

        Is that where you find your identity, your security, and your life compass?

    You were created to be loved by God.

A second reason for our existence is our response to God’s love.

We were created to **glorify God**.

Glorify God.

    To give God glory, to draw attention to him, to lift up the positive attributes and qualities of God.

    In more concrete terms that means

        worshiping him,

        loving him,

        serving him,

        seeking his guidance for our lives,

        telling others of how wonderful he is,

        doing whatever we can to lift him up in our own eyes and the eyes of others.

When you read the story of the Bible,

    the best of human efforts are all about glorifying God.

    When someone answered God’s call to be a prophet,

when someone served as a faithful king in Israel,  
 whenever there was real, heartfelt worship,  
 whenever prayer was an expression of true dependence on him,  
 Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush,  
     and his subsequent answer to God's call,  
 when the man was freed from demons by Jesus,  
     and he went to tell the people of his village,  
 Paul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus,  
     and his ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles,  
 those were all ways of glorifying God.

Jesus said the single most important commandment was,

“Love the Lord your God  
     with all your heart and with all your soul  
     and with all your mind.”

(Mt.22:37)

Loving God, glorifying God.

So what are you doing with your life to bring glory to God?

Do you really open up and worship with your heart?

Do you ever speak his name to those outside the church?

When tough times come to you or someone near you,  
     do you offer up prayers?

When you sense the Spirit nudging you to do or say something,  
     do you obey?

Are you glorifying God with your life?

That's what you were made for.

Always keeping in mind,

this is not our initiative,  
 and not because of our religiosity,  
     but in response to his love.

1 John says, “We love because he first loved us.”

(1Jn.4:19)

So the first purpose for your life is to be loved by God,

and the second purpose is to glorify him, to love him in return.

The truth is, deep down we all know love is at the core of the meaning of life.

Back in the 60s a pop song called “What's it all about?” was big.

Written by Burt Bacharach and sung by Dionne Warwick,  
 it asked one of life's big questions:

“What's it all about, Alfie?

Is it just for the moment we live?

Are we meant to take more than we give?

Or are we meant to be kind?

And if only fools are kind,

Then I guess it's wise to be cruel.

And if life only belongs to the strong,

What will you lend on an old golden rule?

As sure as I believe there's a heaven above,

I know there's something much more.

Something even non-believers can believe in.

I believe in love.

Without true love we just exist.

Until you find the love you've missed, you're nothing.”

Until you find the love you've missed, you're nothing.

Are you living each day in the love of God?

And are you loving him in return?

A third purpose for our existence:

We were created to **enjoy God's creation.**

Enjoyment, joy, fulfillment, satisfaction.

Those are not words most people would associate with Christianity.

When they hear the word "Christian" some people get a picture in their minds,

a black and white picture,

a nun, suggesting austerity and self-denial.

Others might see that painting called American Gothic,

with the old farm couple standing shoulder to shoulder,

with a pitch fork and serious looks on their faces.

Not a smile in sight.

Enjoyment is not part of the picture most people have of Christians.

Too often Christianity has been portrayed,

and actually lived out by too many Christians,

as a list of "thou shalt nots."

And God is the cosmic policeman just waiting for you to cross the line,

so he can whack you.

But that is not the character of God or the life of faith that characterized Jesus.

What was the first miracle Jesus worked in John's Gospel?

He turned water into wine.

He was at a wedding,

and the bride and groom ran out of wine and could have been embarrassed.

Jesus turned somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons of water into wine,

so there would be no embarrassment and party could go on! (Jn.2:1-11)

He was NOT some cosmic killjoy.

In fact, he was at dinner parties often enough,

his enemies called him a drunkard and a glutton! (Mt.11:19)

The apostle Paul wrote,

"God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment." (1Tim.6:17)

We're not supposed to be sour and serious all the time.

God intends for us to have joy and enjoyment in life.

Question:

Do you take time for joy and enjoyment?

Some people are freed up to have a good time.

Some people may be too freed up to have a good time.

But there are others who are so driven, so work-focused,

they are not really human beings;

they are human doings.

Let me suggest that, since Jesus could take time for some enjoyment...

You are NOT more non-essential than he.

I would remind you, too, that the whole concept of Sabbath is that you stop working.

Finally, theologian Dallas Willard wrote of the value of finding joy in this life.

He suggested that part of what makes sin so tempting is that

we have not learned to find joy in our walk with Christ,

so we go looking for it elsewhere.

But if we'd find joy in Christ,

sin would lose its attractiveness.

So let me give you an assignment,  
 a spiritual discipline to exercise during Lent,  
 something that will help you live life with less sin and more faithfulness to Christ.  
 Have some fun.  
 Enjoy life in God's creation.  
 Invite some friends over for dinner.  
 Go fishing, skiing, or just out for a walk in the park.  
 Sit in a comfortable chair with a good book.  
 Or, if you are so inclined, watch some TV,  
 so long as it's not damaging you with less than desirable values.  
 Find what gives you joy in life,  
 and build it into your schedule as a regular feature of your days.

We were made to be loved by God, to glorify God, and to enjoy God's creation.

Finally, we were created to **rule over God's creation**.

Yes, we do have a job to do.

But it's not a heavy burden.

It is what we were created for in the first place.

So in doing that job we'll find fulfillment.

In the Genesis creation story it says,

"God created human beings, making them in his image.

He blessed them and said,

'Fill the earth and subdue it.

Have dominion over every living thing.'" (Gen. 1:27-28)

"The Lord God put the man in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." (Ge.2:15)

Do you hear those verbs?

Subdue it.

Have dominion over it.

Till it and keep it.

We have a responsibility to make responsible use of God's creation.

Not to abuse it,

but to take care of it and make responsible use of it.

This is what is called "stewardship."

One of Jesus' best known parables is about stewardship.

It's a story of a rich master who puts his money into the hands of three servants,

for them to manage while he's gone on a long trip.

And when he returns, each one gives an account of

what he did with what the master had given him. (Mt.25:14-30)

It is a parable of judgment day focusing on

how we make use of what he puts into our lives.

It's about stewardship.

Usually when people hear the word "stewardship" in the church,

they think of us talking about money,

and they head for the doors.

And, yes, stewardship certainly has to do with how we use our money.

It raises the issue of giving to the church

and other worthwhile causes that do God's work.

And it has to do with how we handle ALL of our money,

making it, saving it, giving it, and spending it.

But it's not just about money.

Stewardship is about how we deal with everything in our lives, everything in our world.

How we make use of our talents, abilities, and spiritual gifts.

How we put our education and work experience to work for the kingdom.

How we leverage our personal relationships to glorify God and bless people.

Stewardship is about how you use every aspect of your life for Jesus.

Well, those are four big, broad purposes God has for your existence.

How it works out in each individual life will be different,

according to how God made you,

what he has put in you.

Have you worked it out for your life?

An executive headhunter spent his career recruiting corporate executives for large firms.

When he interviewed an executive,

he liked to disarm him.

"I offer him a drink," said the headhunter,

"take off my coat, undo my tie, put my feet up

and talk about baseball, football, family, whatever, until he's all relaxed.

Then, when I think I've got him relaxed,

I lean over, look him square in the eye and say,

'What's your purpose in life?'

It's amazing how top executives fall apart at that question."

Then he told about interviewing one fellow recently.

He had him all disarmed,

had his feet up on his desk, talking about football.

Then the headhunter leaned over and said,

"What's your purpose in life, Bob?"

And the executive said, without blinking an eye,

"To go to heaven and take as many people with me as I can."

"For the first time in my career," said the headhunter, "I was speechless."

No wonder.

He had encountered someone who was prepared.

He knew his purpose,

"To go to heaven and take as many people with me as I can."

You and I might not express it the same way,

but do you doubt that this is one man who found his life meaningful?

His life has a purpose.

What is your purpose?

### **SERMON NOTES:**

Purposes for life:

1. To be \_\_\_\_\_. (Je.31:3; Jn.15:13)
2. To \_\_\_\_\_ God. (Mt.22:37; 1Jn.4:19)
3. To \_\_\_\_\_ God's creation. (Jn.2:1-11; Mt.11:19; 1Tim.6:17)
4. To \_\_\_\_\_ God's creation. (Ge.1:27-28; 2:15; Mt.25:14-30)