

Text: Ecclesiastes 1.2-9
St Stephen's

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Sat PM/Sun AM

If God Has a Plan, What's My True Purpose?

We are in our “Tough Questions” series... Today we are looking at, “**If God Has a Plan, What's My True Purpose?**”

Author **Ashley Brilliant** says “my life has a superb cast, but I can't figure out the plot.” **Jack Hanley** wrote, “I hope life isn't a joke, because I don't get it.” **Carl Yung**, 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** wrote, “As far as I can see, there is no purpose.”

When I Don't Understand The Purpose Of Life... (Eccl. 1)

Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon in a season of his life when he had **lost his life purpose**. It's tough to make your way through life if you have no sense of where you are going. He said...

Life Seems Useless

"Life is useless, all useless. You spend your life working... but what do you have to show for it? ... (v. 2-4 GN)

The word here translated “**useless**” is the same word used for soap bubble. It's empty, like cotton candy. It looks good but then it pops and there is nothing to show for it. If you have no great purpose for your life, life seems useless.

Life Seems Boring

Everything's boring, utterly boring— no one can find any meaning in it. Boring to the eye, boring to the ear. What was will be again, what happened will happen again. There's nothing new on this earth. Year after year it's the same old thing. Does someone call out, “Hey, this is new”? Don't get excited—it's the same old story.

(v. 8-10 The Message)

Mick Jagger made a living off his song, “*I can't get no satisfaction*” because he was singing for a whole generation who no purpose in life. Never satisfied. Never content. People are restless. Just give people a **TV remote** and watch

them! Did you know that the average person will change channels 350,000 times in their lifetime -- some of you have already beat that! King Solomon was saying, "I've been there and done that and I'm bored." Your life purpose has to **solve the problem of boredom.**

Life Seems Meaningless

"No one remembers what has happened in the past, and no one in days to come will remember what happens between now and then." (v. 11 GN)

Your name may be in lights today but nobody is going to remember you tomorrow. **James Dobson** tells the story of how he was UCLA tennis champ as an undergrad. They put a trophy in a **display case** in the school with his name on it. It was a significant achievement. He was so proud. Decades later he got a package in the mail. They had **remodeled** the school and a workman found his trophy in the trash and recognized his name on it and sent it to him. Dobson said in response, "*Sooner or later, life trashes all your trophies.*" You set the records on the track today and tomorrow they're broken by somebody else and you're forgotten. You build a building with your name on it and just a few years later, no one remembers who you were. Your life purpose has to be bigger than your trophies.

People **try all kinds of answers.** Rap artist, Ice Tea, wrote, "*The only reason we're here is to reproduce. Just **chill out and reproduce.** Keep the species alive.*" Can I introduce my daughters to that guy? Some people think that the purpose of life is to **shop till you drop.** But then you are bored with your bargains and devoured by your debt. And you still have this gnawing question deep inside, "*Is this what life is all about?*"

I can't tell you your specific purpose in life. I don't know it. You're going to have to discover that over time. It's a **journey** you have to walk. But along that walk there are some **key questions that will point you in the right direction.**

A **first grader** asked his mother "*Where did I come from?*" The mother took a deep breath and went into a detailed, specific explanation of the reproductive organs, conception and birth. After about 30 minutes the wide-eyed first grader said, "*OK Mom, but Jimmy comes from San Diego. Where do I come from?*" The mother said, "*I had the sinking feeling that I was answering the wrong question.*"

I want to give you what I think are the **key questions you have to ask** – and answer – along the way to finding your purpose for life. If you ask some key questions, and get some real answers, they will give you **a framework** to figure out your own personal life purpose.

Six “Life Purpose” Questions

1. What Will Be The Center Of My Life?

What am I going to live for? You have to start with this question. Everyone has something at the center of their life. You could center your life around your career, your family, making money, becoming popular, having fun. You could center your life around yourself. A lot of people do. **But here is the problem with all these options - none of them are going to last.** You need a purpose for your life that will **still be there** if your job goes away. Still be there when the kids move out. Still be there if you are facing an unwanted disease. You need a purpose for your life that will make sense out of your whole life.

God Says He - Made Me For A Love Relationship With Him

It is the highest purpose for your life. Before we can talk about anything else, you have to understand **this** is what on earth you’re here for – for a love relationship with God. God **made you - to love you... and he made you - to love him back.** God **knows everything** about you and He still loves you and wants you to know Him and love Him back. This is how **Jesus** said it:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. This is the first and greatest commandment." Matt. 22:38 (LB)

A love relationship with another person means trusting them, speaking to them, enjoying them, listening to them, serving them. That’s how it works with God. Christianity is a **relationship, not a religion.**

You ask, *"Why am I here? Where am I going? What should I do with my life?"* Often those questions don’t clear up until you get into this love relationship with God. And until you say “yes” to that, life isn’t going to make sense. Your life is not about you. It is all about God!

2. What Will Be The Character Of My Life?

We worry a lot about what we are going to do with our lives. But God is far more interested in **who you are** than **what you do**. You can do a lot of important things in life, but He wants you to **be** something.

God Says He - Made Me To Be Like Christ

He wants me to have the character of Christ and the convictions of Christ and the compassion of Christ.

"from the very beginning God decided that those who came to him...should become like his Son." Rom 8:29

Here's the deal, though. If God is going to make you like Jesus Christ that means He's going to **take you through many of the same experiences that Jesus Christ went through**. And He promises to go through them with you. That's how it happens. That includes **tough times**. Were there times when Jesus was **lonely**? Yes. Were there times when Jesus was **tempted**? Yes. Were there times when He faced real **discouragement**? Yes. Were there times when **people got in his face**? Yes. Do you think you're exempt from any of those? No. Why? Because God's more committed to your **character**, than to your **comfort** or your **convenience**. The Bible says that God will use everything that happens in your life to help you get to know Him and become like His son Jesus Christ, because that is one of the great purposes of your life.

3. What Will Be The Contribution Of My Life?

There are two types of people in life: givers and takers. You weren't put here on earth to take; you were put here to give. You were **put here to make a contribution** with your life, to **make this world a better place for your presence**.

God Says He - Made Me To Give

You can live for yourself. Or you can live for others.

"God has given each of you some special abilities; be sure to use them to help each other, passing on to others God's many kinds of blessings." 1 Pet. 4:10

The person who just lives for himself, who **holds tightly** to his possessions and his time with **closed hands** - is the person who is **bored** and **empty** and **poor**— no matter how much he has. But the person who has open hands and an open heart

and gives his life away, who is **generous with his possessions or his time** lives a life that is filled up and overflowing and wealthy with a wealth that the world can't give – no matter how little he has.

We have to learn this about life; God didn't make the world **to serve you**. You were made to **serve God and give to others**. **Life is not about you**, it is all **about God**. And all **about others**. That's why God has put you here.

4. What Will Be The Communication Of My Life?

Your life speaks. Everyone's does. Everyone's life is like a **car** that has a **bumper sticker** on the back. You drive by and people read it. The question is, what does it say? Does it say, *"It's all about me"*, *"I'm too busy"*, *"The one who dies with the most toys, wins"*, *"I'm a victim"*, or *"Get out of my way"*.

I know some people in this congregation whose lives speak some different words: *"People matter to God"*, *"God answers prayer"*, *"I serve"*, *"All for Jesus."* When Bill Bright was a young man he signed a commitment to God. The key words were: *"From this day forward I am a slave of Jesus Christ."*

God Made Me to Share Good News

The communication of your life ought to include **your testimony** of how Christ has changed your life. Some of those testimonies are spectacular and fast. Some are slow and plodding. All are valuable. I have never heard a testimony to the life changing power of Christ that God can't use. You should be able to clearly and briefly speak about **how you used to be** before you met Christ **and how Christ has changed you** and **the difference** that has made in your life.

"Life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus -- the work of telling others the Good News about God's mighty kindness and love."
Acts 20:24 (LB)

The communication of your life also ought to include some the **life lessons** God has taught you. Think for a minute about what God has taught you in a few of the seasons of your life...

When you had no money – or when you had a lot of it...

When you were sharply tempted or even failed...

When you needed clear guidance from him...

When you had to wait and God seemed distant...

When you faced pain or illness or death...

Those lessons are pure gold. Do you write them down and learn them well and live them faithfully? If you do, do you **pass them on**? People who live for God's purposes do.

5. What Will Be The Community Of My Life?

Patrick spoke well last week about **the disease of loneliness** in our world. Mother Theresa used to say of all the diseases in the world, loneliness is the worst. It kills more people than all the other terrible diseases on this earth.

God Made Me to Fellowship

Jesus said... *"Love each other as I have loved you."* John 15:12

No one lies on their **deathbed** and says, *"bring me my bank book, bring me my Visa card, bring me my trophies!"* When life is at its end we want our families and friends close by, those who have loved us through the journey of life. And we want God there. Because life is all about love.

Jesus' love is meant to be **the defining mark** of his followers. That means that his church is supposed to be a place where you can **meet** his followers and **get to know** his followers and **grow** with his followers and serve with his followers. That's why we are always asking people to **join** our church family and get into **small groups** or join a **ministry team**. Because you can't love if you don't **take time** for other people. You can't love if you don't **invest** in other people. **(Photographic directory)**

In different parts of the New Testament there are a number of verses that express this love we have for each other and they all use the same phrase: **"one another"**. Last week Patrick shared some of them with you. I want to bring them back again, because they are so important. We're to *"love one another... forgive... bear one another's burdens... welcome... be kind... encourage, do good, pray for, speak the truth, submit to, agree with, serve... one another."* Because we belong to one another.

Don't you think you could use more of that in your life? God made you for the purpose of love.

6. What Will Be The Capacity Of My Life?

This is one of the most important questions of all. How are you going to do all these things? Where will you find the power, the heart, the courage, the persistence, the capacity? How will you avoid stress and burn out and defeat and exhaustion? Where will you find the ability to live a life that matters? God has made you to live **beyond your capacity**.

God Made Me To Receive Strength From Him

Football teams have quarterbacks and linemen and defensive backs... and receivers. You are a receiver. It is maybe the biggest part of your purpose that you learn how to receive God's grace and be filled with the Holy Spirit of Jesus. Paul wrote...

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Php 4:12-13

Sometimes you think when your little boat of life faces some challenging waves, I'll just rev up the engine and try harder. So we crank up our determination and screw up our courage and pedal faster. But I want to tell you that **you are a sailboat, not a motorboat**. You need to **raise up your sails** and catch the wind of the Holy Spirit and let Jesus fill you and blow you where he wants you to go. It is the secret of living beyond your capacity, and of living a life of purpose.

You can do everything through him who gives you strength.