

The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For? (Warren, Rick)

A life devoted to things is a dead life, a stump; a God-shaped life is a flourishing tree. PROVERBS 11:28 (MSG)

“Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life.”<sup>2</sup>

The Bible says, “Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self.”<sup>3</sup>

The greatest tragedy is not death, but life without purpose.

The Bible says, “A pretentious, showy life is an empty life; a plain and simple life is a full life.”

It’s human nature to get distracted by minor issues. We play Trivial Pursuit with our lives. Henry David Thoreau observed that people live lives of “quiet desperation,” but today a better description is aimless distraction.

George Bernard Shaw wrote, “This is the true joy of life: the being used up for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clot of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.”

When you understand that life is a test, you realize that nothing is insignificant in your life. Even the smallest incident has significance for your character development. Every day is an important day, and every second is a growth opportunity to deepen your character, to demonstrate love, or to depend on God.

Busyness is a great enemy of relationships. We become preoccupied with making a living, doing our work, paying bills, and accomplishing goals as if these tasks are the point of life. They are not. The point of life is learning to love — God and people. Life minus love equals zero.

Relationships, not achievements or the acquisition of things, are what matters most in life. So why do we allow our relationships to get the short end of the stick? When our schedules become overloaded, we start skimming relationally, cutting back on giving the time, energy, and attention that loving relationships require. What's most important to God is displaced by what's urgent.

“These three things continue forever: faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love.”<sup>8</sup>

As Mother Teresa said, “It's not what you do, but how much love you put into it that matters.” Love is the secret of a lasting heritage.

The importance of things can be measured by how much time we are willing to invest in them. The more time you give to something, the more you reveal its importance and value to you. If you want to know a person's priorities, just look at how they use their time.

Time is your most precious gift because you only have a set amount of it. You can make more money, but you can't make more time. When you give someone your time, you are giving them a portion of your life that you will never get back.

Your time is your life. That is why the greatest gift you can give someone is your time.

Real fellowship is so much more than just showing up at services. It is experiencing life together. It includes unselfish loving, honest sharing, practical serving, sacrificial giving, sympathetic comforting, and all the other “one another” commands found in the New Testament.

Or we're preoccupied with our own hurts. Self-pity dries up sympathy for others.

The Bible tells us to “speak the truth in love”<sup>3</sup> because we can’t have community without candor. Solomon said, “An honest answer is a sign of true friendship.”<sup>4</sup>

Mr. “Don’t Rock the Boat” jumps in and tries to smooth everyone’s ruffled feathers, the issue is never resolved, and everyone lives with an underlying frustration. Everyone knows about the problem, but no one talks about it openly. This creates a sick environment of secrets where gossip thrives. Paul’s solution was straightforward: “No more lies, no more pretense. Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ’s body we’re all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself.”<sup>6</sup>

The Bible tells us there is a right time and a right way to do everything.<sup>8</sup> Thoughtless words leave lasting wounds. God tells us to speak to each other in the church as loving family members: “Never use harsh words when you correct an older man, but talk to him as if he were your father. Talk to younger men as if they were your brothers, older women as if they were your mothers, and younger women as if they were your sisters.”<sup>9</sup>

Cultivating community takes humility. Self-importance, smugness, and stubborn pride destroy fellowship faster than anything else. Pride builds walls between people; humility builds bridges. Humility is the oil that smooths and soothes relationships. That’s why the Bible says, “Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.”<sup>11</sup> The proper dress for fellowship is a humble attitude.

“Give more honor to others than to yourselves. Do not be interested only in your own life, but be interested in the lives of others.”<sup>14</sup>

Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less. Humility is thinking more of others. Humble people are so focused on serving others, they don’t think of themselves.

Will we love them as brothers and sisters and treat them with dignity?

I urge you to make a group covenant that includes the nine characteristics of biblical fellowship: We will share our true feelings (authenticity), encourage each other (mutuality), support each other (sympathy), forgive each other (mercy), speak the truth in love (honesty), admit our weaknesses (humility), respect our differences (courtesy), not gossip (confidentiality), and make group a priority (frequency).

Attack the problem, not the person. You cannot fix the problem if you're consumed with fixing the blame. You must choose between the two. The Bible says, "A gentle response defuses anger, but a sharp tongue kindles a temper-fire."

Nothing shapes your life more than the commitments you choose to make. Your commitments can develop you or they can destroy you, but either way, they will define you. Tell me what you are committed to, and I'll tell you what you will be in twenty years. We become whatever we are committed to.

"The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives."

It is the fire of suffering that brings forth the gold of godliness. MADAME GUYON

POINT TO PONDER: There is a purpose behind every problem.

EVERY TEMPTATION IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO GOOD.

Character development always involves a choice, and temptation provides that opportunity.

We learn real peace by choosing to trust God in circumstances in which we are tempted to worry or be afraid. Likewise, patience is developed in circumstances in which we're forced to wait and are tempted to be angry or have a short fuse.

I have already pointed out that the truth will set us free but it often makes us miserable first.

This is why you cannot grow without a humble, teachable attitude.

Satan will try to steal the joy of service from you in a couple of ways: by tempting you to compare your ministry with others, and by tempting you to conform your ministry to the expectations of others. Both are deadly traps that will distract you from serving in the ways God intended. Whenever you lose your joy in ministry, start by considering if either one of these temptations is the cause.

As John Bunyan said, “If my life is fruitless, it doesn’t matter who praises me, and if my life is fruitful, it doesn’t matter who criticizes me.”

The world defines greatness in terms of power, possessions, prestige, and position. If you can demand service from others, you have arrived. In our self-serving culture with its me-first mentality, acting like a servant is not a popular concept.

Jesus, however, measured greatness in terms of service, not status. God determines your greatness by how many people you serve, not how many people serve you. This is so contrary to the world’s idea of greatness that we have a hard time understanding it, much less practicing it. The disciples argued about who deserved the most prominent position, and 2,000 years later, Christian leaders still jockey for position and prominence in churches, denominations, and parachurch ministries.

Anyone can be a servant. All it requires is character.

Jesus said, “You can tell what they are by what they do.”<sup>1</sup>

The Bible says, “If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done.”

You will never arrive at the state in life where you're too important to help with menial tasks. God will never exempt you from the mundane. It's a vital part of your character curriculum. The Bible says, "If you think you are too important to help someone in need, you are only fooling yourself. You are really a nobody."<sup>7</sup> It is in these small services that we grow like Christ.

Jesus specialized in menial tasks that everyone else tried to avoid: washing feet, helping children, fixing breakfast, and serving lepers. Nothing was beneath him, because he came to serve. It wasn't in spite of his greatness that he did these things, but because of it, and he expects us to follow his example.<sup>6</sup>

Great opportunities often disguise themselves in small tasks. The little things in life determine the big things. Don't look for great tasks to do for God. Just do the not-so-great stuff, and God will assign you whatever he wants you to do. But before attempting the extraordinary, try serving in ordinary ways.<sup>10</sup>

Notoriety means nothing to real servants because they know the difference between prominence and significance.

That's why humility is a daily struggle, a lesson I must relearn over and over. The opportunity to be a servant confronts me dozens of times a day, in which I'm given the choice to decide between meeting my needs or the needs of others. Self-denial is the core of servanthood.

Humility is not putting yourself down or denying your strengths; rather, it is being honest about your weaknesses. The more honest you are, the more of God's grace you get. You will also receive grace from others.

The most essential quality for leadership is not perfection, but credibility. People must be able to trust you, or they won't follow you. How do you build credibility? Not by pretending to be perfect, but by being honest.

Your mission gives your life meaning. William James said, “The best use of life is to spend it for something that outlasts it.”

There isn't enough time to learn everything in life by trial and error. We must learn from the life lessons of one another. The Bible says, “A warning given by an experienced person to someone willing to listen is more valuable than ... jewelry made of the finest gold.”<sup>9</sup>

What has God taught me from failure? What has God taught me from a lack of money? What has God taught me from pain or sorrow or depression? What has God taught me through waiting? What has God taught me through illness? What has God taught me from disappointment? What have I learned from my family, my church, my relationships, my small group, and my critics?

You should not expect everyone else to be passionate about your passion. Instead, we must listen to and value each other's life message because nobody can say it all. Never belittle someone else's godly passion. The Bible says, “It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good.”<sup>14</sup>

Whenever you feel apathetic about your mission in the world, spend some time thinking about what Jesus did for you on the cross.

The Bible says, “There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear.”

The Bible says, “My friends, stop thinking like children. Think like mature people.”<sup>3</sup> This is the first step to becoming a world-class Christian. Children only think of themselves; grown-ups think of others. God commands, “Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too.”<sup>4</sup>

The Bible says, “As iron sharpens iron, so people can improve each other.”<sup>1</sup>

Paul urged, "Let your enthusiastic idea at the start be equaled by your realistic action now."<sup>7</sup>

James said, "Anyone who knows the right thing to do, but does not do it, is sinning."<sup>14</sup>

Most people struggle with three basic issues in life. The first is identity: "Who am I?" The second is importance: "Do I matter?" The third is impact: "What is my place in life?" The answers to all three questions are found in God's five purposes for you.

What will be the character of my life? This is the question of discipleship. What kind of person will you be? God is far more interested in what you are than what you do. Remember, you will take your character into eternity, but not your career.

In addition to writing a detailed life purpose statement, it is also helpful to have a shorter statement or slogan that summarizes the five purposes for your life in a way that's memorable and inspires you. Then you can remind yourself daily. Solomon advised, "It will be good to keep these things in mind so that you are ready to repeat them."<sup>18</sup>

I once heard the suggestion that you develop your life purpose statement based on what you would like other people to say about you at your funeral. Imagine your perfect eulogy, then build your statement on that. Frankly, that's a bad plan. At the end of your life it isn't going to matter at all what other people say about you. The only thing that will matter is what God says about you. The Bible says, "Our purpose is to please God, not people."<sup>20</sup> One day God will review your answers to these life questions. Did you put Jesus at the center of your life? Did you develop his character? Did you devote your life to serving others? Did you communicate his message and fulfill his mission? Did you love and participate in his family? These are the only issues that will count. As Paul said, "Our goal is to measure up to God's plan for us."<sup>21</sup> God Wants to Use You About thirty years ago, I noticed a little phrase in Acts 13:36 that forever altered the direction of my life. It was only seven words but, like the stamp of a searing hot branding iron, my life was permanently marked by these words: "David served God's purpose in his generation."<sup>22</sup> Now I understood why God called David "a man after my



own heart.”<sup>23</sup> David dedicated his life to fulfilling God’s purposes on earth.

heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones. PROVERBS 14:30 (NIV) “I observed all the work and ambition motivated by envy. What a waste!” ECCLESIASTES 4:4 (MSG)

YOU CANNOT FULFILL GOD’S PURPOSE FOR YOUR LIFE IF YOU ENVY the lives of others.

Stop comparing yourself to others! This is the starting point. Comparing is the root of all envy. Unfortunately, from about the time we each began to walk, we also began to compare.

Remember this: God has not called you to be the best in the world at anything! He has called you to be the best you can be, given your background, experiences, opportunities, and abilities. So ... decide right now that you are going to break the habit of comparing yourself to others.

It’s not hard to offer comfort when people hurt or experience loss, even if they are a rival. It’s much harder to celebrate others’ success, especially if you aren’t succeeding in that area.

When was the last time you thanked God for what he did for somebody else?

If you would like to increase the amount of happiness you experience in life, here is one of the secrets: learn to enjoy the successes and joys of others. If you are only happy when good things happen to you, then you will be unhappy for much of your life, since no one experiences only good things. But if you learn to enjoy other people’s victories too, you will always have something to be happy about.

Envy asks, “Why them? Why do they get what I don’t have?” Gratitude asks, “Why me? Why do I get all that I have?” David modeled this kind of gratitude when he prayed, “Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?”<sup>15</sup> Years later, his son

would write, "It is better to be satisfied with what you have than to be always wanting something else."

Jesus famously said, "The truth will set you free."

Jesus said, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you!"