

40 Days of Purpose, part 1: What on Earth am I here for?

Message for Sunday, October 13, 2013

Scripture: Ephesians 1:4-5

Children's Message: (from Colossians 1:16)

In advance:

- Make my own invention: an alligator trap (make it as bizarre as possible).
- For special dramatic effect, hide the contraption under a sheet covering so it can be revealed at the appropriate time.
- Have a child sit in a chair at the front. Cover this child with a sheet, and ask her/him to sit very still.

Good morning, boys and girls. Let me show you something I made. I'm so proud of this; I did it all by myself. I'm sure you will be so impressed with it and you'll obviously be able to see what it is. (Remove covering to reveal invention.) Ta-dah! Clearly you can see what this is and what it is designed for. Who would like to tell me what it is and what it does?

Receive any guesses and then continue.

I can't believe you didn't get it right. Well, I suppose I should tell you since I am the one who made it. This is an alligator trap. I've always wanted to have a pet alligator, one could that I could pet and take for walks, and just play with. But the pet stores don't have any alligators.

We all know that alligators live in the water, so I'm going to set this up down by the Mill Pond. We all know that everyone loves bananas, so the banana is the bait. When the alligator comes out of the water to eat the banana, the lid will fall down, trapping it inside. I'll just go back the next day and pick up my alligator. Isn't that brilliant! *Listen to feedback.*

I suppose I should not be surprised that you did not know the purpose of the machine. I suppose it would only make sense to ask the person who created it and he could tell you its purpose.

Now what have we over here? (Move towards the child under the sheet.)

Let's see. (Remove the sheet with flair.) Ah! This is a person. What purpose is he designed for? Hmm...I suppose we should ask the one who made him. God, why did you make this person? Why is this person here on earth? What's his purpose?

Who created this person? Yes, God did. God would know his purpose.

It says in Colossians 1:16b (Msg), "Everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him." Today when we worship, let's think about the fact that God made us for his purposes and we need to learn what those purposes are. That's what we're going to do over the next month.

Sermon: "40 Days of Purpose, part 1: What on Earth am I here for?"

Based on a message by Rick Warren.

Why am I alive?

A man is driving down the road and breaks down near a monastery. He goes to the monastery, knocks on the door, and says, "My car broke down. Do you think I could stay the night?"

The monks graciously accept him, feed him dinner, even fix his car. As the man tries to fall asleep, he hears a strange sound. The next morning, he asks the monks what the sound was, but they say, "We can't tell you. You're not a monk."

The man is disappointed but thanks them anyway and goes about his merry way.

Some years later, the same man breaks down in front of the same monastery. The monks again accept him, feed him, even fix his car. That night, he hears the same strange noise that he had heard years earlier.

The next morning, he asks what it is, but the monks reply, "We can't tell you. You're not a monk."

The man says, "All right, all right. I'm dying to know. If the only way I can find out what that sound was is to become a monk, how do I become a monk?"

The monks reply, "You must travel the earth and tell us how many blades of grass there are and the exact number of sand pebbles. When you find these numbers, you will become a monk."

The man sets about his task. Forty-five years later, he returns and knocks on the door of the monastery. He says, "I have travelled the earth and have found what you have asked for. There are 145,236,284,232 blades of grass and 231,281,219,999,129,382 sand pebbles on the earth."

The monks reply, "Congratulations. You are now a monk. We shall now show you the way to the sound."

The monks lead the man to a wooden door, where the head monk says, “The sound is right behind that door.”

The man reaches for the knob, but the door is locked. They give him the key for it; he unlocks the door, opens it and finds... another door, this one made of stone.

They give him the key, he opens it, and finds another door, made of sapphire. He continues on through doors made of emerald, silver, topaz and amethyst. Finally, the monks say, “This is the last key to the last door.”

The man is relieved to no end. He unlocks the door, turns the knob, and behind that door he is amazed to find the source of that strange sound.

But I can't tell you what it is because you're not a monk.

That's how many people think about the meaning of life: it's a mystery they'll never figure out. And for some, life is just a big joke: there is no purpose to it.

What we're doing, starting today and over the next 40 days, is looking at the purpose of life. We're asking the question, “What on earth am I here for?”

This is not a new question, by the way. A fellow by the name of Jeremiah asked the same question a few thousand years ago:

Jeremiah 20:18, Today's English Version:

Why was I born?

Was it only to have trouble and sorrow, to end my life in disgrace?

Some people have come up with answers about the purpose of life. Some would say that the purpose of life is pleasure – have fun, party hardy. A lot of young people have told me that's what they live for – the weekend party.

Some would say that life is all about acquiring things. Your life is measured by the things you own. Your net worth tells you what your life is worth. The problem with that is that, “The who dies with the most toys...” still dies.

There's the pleasure approach, the materialistic approach; or you can try the self-help approach. Bookstores have entire shelves with these books. They will help you motivate yourself and achieve success. But success as our world defines it is not the same as fulfilling your purpose in life.

A lot of people tell me their family is the most important thing in their life. That's where their purpose in life is: their family.

Pleasure and parties, possessions and money, success, family — all these are things on which people based their lives. And when these things let them down, they find that their reason for living has vanished. A lot of people who commit suicide do so after their reason for living let them down.

You find your purpose by getting to know God and reading the *User's Guide*

Let's have a little quiz here. (*Hold up several unusual gadgets.*) Do you know what these things are used for?

- The yellow things that looks like giant tweezers is for pulling computer chips off a circuit board.
- The blue thing with the white tube is for purifying water when you're backpacking in the wilderness.

Here's the point: if you don't know something's purpose, you're probably going to use it the wrong way. The way you get to know something's purpose is either (a) you talk to the creator or inventor, or (b) you read the *User's Guide*.

The way to find out your purpose in life – it's not by following some philosophy or approach, it's not by reading a self-help book – the way to find out your purpose in life is by talking to the Creator and reading the *User's Guide*.

You find your purpose by getting to know God.

Now I know that not everyone buys into the idea that God is Lord over all, or that there even is a God. Bertrand Russell was one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century, and he was an atheist. One of his more famous sayings was:

“Unless you assume the existence of God, the question of life's meaning and purpose is irrelevant.” – Bertrand Russell, atheist philosopher

That makes perfect sense. If there is no God, if we are just a freak chance of nature, the result of completely random chemical reactions, which entirely by chance evolved into our present form, then life truly has no meaning or purpose. I certainly admire Russell's intellectual honesty in telling the truth about atheism.

I'll go back to what I said a moment ago: **You find your purpose by getting to know God.**

Let's look in the *User's Guide* (i.e. the Bible), and see what God wants us to know about the reason why we're here.

Proverbs 16:4, New Living Translation:

The Lord has made everything for his own purposes, even the wicked for punishment.

Colossians 1:15-16, The Message:

We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below... everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him.

All of creation – and that includes you and me – was made with a purpose. We are not accidents.

Next Sunday, we're going to start looking at the specific purposes God has for our lives. I want to finish today with God's *general* purpose for our lives.

Our general purpose: to be loved by God

Why, then, did God create us? What was God thinking when he did that?

Ephesians 1:4, The Message:

Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love.

I've underlined "the focus of his love." If you don't get anything else as we start these 40 days, I want you to understand this: God made you to love you. You might want to write that down. **You were created to be loved by God.**

God is love and God wanted to create something to love and so he created you. God didn't *need* you; he *wanted* you. And before we can talk about anything else, you have to understand this is what on earth you're here for — to be loved by God.

Jesus is God who came to earth in person to show us that love, to offer it to us. It's up to each one of us to choose whether to accept that love.

Let's bow our heads. You know God had a purpose in bringing you here today. He wants you to know him and he wants you to know his purposes for you. So talk to him. You don't have to use any fancy words. If you

don't know what to say, just follow me in this prayer...just go "me too, God."

"Dear God, I realize that if it weren't for you, I wouldn't be alive. But because you made me, you must have a purpose for me. I admit that I focused on my plans for my life, not yours. But I want to know your purposes for me, so I commit the next 40 days to learning about it.

Thank you that you made me to love me. Thank you that you cared for me even when I didn't know you. Thank you that I was made to last forever. I want a life filled with meaning. I want to start by getting to know you better. So as best as I understand, I ask you, Jesus Christ, to come into my life and help me to understand your purposes for me. I want to take the first step today. In your name I pray, Amen."