

What on earth am I here for? – Discipleship, Becoming Like Jesus Week 4 of 40 Days of Purpose

Message for Sunday, November 3, 2013
based on a message by Rick Warren

Scripture: Philippians 2:5; Romans 5:3-4; 8:28-29;
Ephesians 4:13-15

Children's Message: (Philippians 2:3-5)
Play “Simon says” with the children. Lead them through a mime of blowing up a balloon, taking a tack, and bursting it. At the climax, leave out the “Simon says” – almost sure to get half of them right there.

Today's Bible passage says:

Philippians 2:5, New Century Version:
In your lives you must think and act like Christ Jesus.

God wants us to copy Jesus: think like him, treat people like he did, even forgive those who hurt us.

Message: “What on earth am I here for? – Discipleship, Becoming Like Jesus” Week 4 of *40 Days of Purpose*

We're reading the Bible to discover what is God's purpose for our lives. Those of you who were here back a few weeks ago when we started the *40 Days of Purpose* may remember some of the strange things I brought, to see if anyone knew what they were, or what they are used for. I came across a really weird one this week: a potfor. Have any of you ever seen a potfor? I didn't bring one with me, so I can't show it to you. Does anyone here know what on earth is a potfor? [Answer: a pot is for cooking. ☺] I just want us to remember the reason we're doing this 40 Days of Purpose: the key to a meaningful life is knowing what our purpose is. Why on earth are we here? What was God thinking when he created us?

Two weeks ago we saw that our first purpose is to know and love God, and I called that “worship.” Last week we saw that our second purpose is belonging to the Body of Christ, the church, and I called that “fellowship.”

1) We are made for discipleship: become like Jesus

Today we're looking at the same verse as last week. It's known as the “Great Commission,” and we're looking at another part of it:

Matthew 28:19-20, New Living Translation:
“Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son

and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

We are those new disciples. And what does a disciple do? Obey Jesus' commands. Follow his teaching. Follow his example. Follow him.

Matthew 16:24, Today's English Version:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you want to come with me, you must forget yourself, carry your cross, and follow me.

Our third purpose in life is *discipleship*: becoming devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

Another way to express this the idea of being a disciple is that we *become like Jesus Christ*.

Romans 8:29, Living Bible:

For from the very beginning God decided that those who came to him — and all along he knew who would — should become like his Son.

God's plan has always been for people to become like himself. Now let's be clear about this: this doesn't mean that you're going to be a god. Your spouse might think you're a god, but you're not. In fact, he or she probably doesn't think that at all. Maybe in your own mind you think you're a god, but you're not. God doesn't want you to become a god; he wants you to become *godly* – like God. He wants you to adopt his values, his character.

Ephesians 4:13, 15, New Living Translation:

... we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ. ...

Instead, we will hold to the truth in love, becoming more and more in every way like Christ.

That's our purpose: to become mature, to become like Jesus.

How does God do this? How does God take self-centred, proud, greedy humans, and transform us so that we become like Jesus?

Well, there are a couple of ways we know already. We know God uses the Bible to teach us his ways; it's up to us to respond to his Word. God also uses people, and that's why last week we talked about how important it is to be connected to one another in the church, especially in small groups. We learn from each other, and we grow and develop.

2) Nothing is so bad that God can't use it for good

But God uses more than just those two things. You may be surprised at some of the others.

Romans 8:28, New International Version:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Note: this verse doesn't say that God causes those things to happen, just that he can use them.

That's Romans 8:28. Now what is God's purpose? We just read that a few moments ago. Remember Romans 8:29 above? We are to "become like his Son." Put those two verses together and what do you get? – "All the things that happen in our lives, God uses them to help us grow and become like Jesus."

"All things"!! Even the bad things that happen to us. Even the mistakes from our sins. God can use those to bring good in our lives, to help us grow.

But there's a problem: these things don't automatically make you grow. Some people go through these things and become bitter rather than better. You have to have your heart ready. Let's prepare our hearts with a song.

[sing "Have Thine Own Way, Lord"]

3) God uses trouble to teach us to trust him

Suppose you go through life, and everything is perfect. You get the job you wanted, you get the spouse you wanted, you get the home you wanted – everything is great. What does that do for your faith? What does that do for your character? You'll likely end up believing that God is your servant, and his job is to run when you snap your fingers. When troubles come in our lives, God can use that to change our attitude.

Romans 5:3-4, New Century Version:

We also have joy with our troubles, because we know that these troubles produce patience. And patience produces character, and character produces hope.

Friends, learn this: God is far more interested in your character than in your comfort. The common response when troubles happen is, "Lord, why me? What have I done wrong?" We want a nice, comfortable life. God wants something better than that.

The desert north of Tucson, Arizona is home to astonishing experiment: a miniature Earth. It's called "Biosphere 2" (Earth itself is "Biosphere 1"), and it consists of a three acre greenhouse complex. It is split

into compartments, each one a separate environment, including a desert, rain forest, even an miniature ocean. When it was completed in 1991, a team of scientists tried living in there for two years. Nearly every weather condition could be simulated except one: wind. And that caused a problem. Without the stress caused by wind, trees grew but had no strength. A number of acacia trees bent over and snapped. They could not hold up even their own weight. Though our culture cringes at hardship, it's good for us to realize that God uses it to help us grow.

Every problem has a purpose. It doesn't matter whether you caused it or somebody else caused it, whether it's an accident or intentional. God will use it to help you grow and become like Jesus.

Jesus had a lot of trouble during his life. But it came to a climax one day. The night before, he took his disciples with him to a private place. He needed to pray, but he also wanted some friends close by. (That's another example why it's so important to be part of a church – we help one another during the hard times.)

Mark 14:34, Today's English Version:

He said to them, "The sorrow in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me."

Some of you know what that's like, to feel like you're at your limit, you can't take any more, it's squeezing the very life out of you.

Now listen to how Jesus continued his prayer:

Mark 14:36, New Living Translation:

"Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will, not mine."

If you're going to become like Jesus Christ, you've got to learn to trust God completely, even when things look terrible, even when you don't understand it, even when you may die as a result of what's happening.

It's easy to trust God when everything is going great in your life. The real growth happens when you trust God in your troubles.

Here's hope: remember that what we see around us is only momentary. They are nothing compared to the glory that awaits us.

2 Corinthians 4:17, Contemporary English Version:

These little troubles are getting us ready for an eternal glory that will make all our troubles seem like nothing.

Now before you gang up to stone me for saying that the things you've gone through or are going through right now are "little troubles" – remember, those aren't my words, but Paul's. And Paul had as much hardship as anyone: beaten, imprisoned, people trying to murder him – all of these several times.

What about you: What has been the greatest trouble in your life? How have you grown as a result of that?

Ponder about that for a moment. If you feel brave, pair up with someone sitting near you. Share your answers to those questions: *What has been the greatest trouble in your life? How have you grown as a result of that?* Take a minute or two now for that.

Next Step:

- Surrender your life to God, trusting that he is with you to help you through it all. Join in the following prayer:

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, life makes so much more sense when we realize that it's not about our comfort, it's all about character and becoming like Jesus. Help us to use life for the reason you gave it to us.

Now you pray. You can pray with me:

Dear God, I want to grow in character. I want to become who you made me to be. Thank-you for the model of Jesus. I want to become more like Jesus in the way I think and the way I feel and the way I act. And if that means taking me through troubled times, then I say "I want your will for my life."

If you've never opened your life to Jesus Christ, say:

Jesus, I can't live like you unless I know you. So I want to get to know you today. As much as I know how I want to ask you to come into my life and heart. In your name I pray. Amen.

"The difference between Uncle Sam and Jesus Christ is that Uncle Sam won't enlist you unless you are healthy and Jesus won't enlist you unless you are sick. What is God looking for in the world? Assistants? No. The gospel is not a help-wanted ad. It is a help-available ad. God is not looking for people to work for him but people who let him work mightily in and through them."

– John Piper