

What on earth am I here for? Evangelism

Week 6 of 40 Days of Purpose

Message for Sunday, November 24, 2013
based on a message by Rick Warren

Scripture: Matthew 28:19-20, 2 Peter 3:9, Acts 1:8

Children's Message: from Acts 1:8

Arrange ahead of time for two of the children to bump into each other. One apologizes, and the other apologizes even more profusely; the first begs forgiveness, and the other one says, "Oh no, it's me who needs forgiveness."

Ask some of the other children, "What happened there? What did you see?" They are being witnesses. Usually we think of a witness as someone who goes to court and tells the judge what they saw happen – usually something bad.

The Bible tells us to be witnesses – but we are witnesses of something good. We are witnesses of what Jesus does:

- He shows us how to love people
- He tells us to forgive people when they hurt us, even our enemies
- He died on the cross, to forgive our sins
- Because of that forgiveness, we have peace and hope and joy and love.

We don't go to court and tell the judge. Instead, we tell the people around us.

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If I try to use this screwdriver to break open a can of pop, I'll end up with big mess. I should just use my finger to lift the tab. Likewise, if I use my finger to tighten a screw, I won't be able to budge it, and I'll just get blisters. When we use things in the way they were never meant to be used, we end up frustrated and miserable. The same thing is true of our lives. A lot of people are frustrated and miserable because they are using their lives in ways that God never intended.

We're reading the Bible to discover God's purpose for our lives. It's been an exciting time, as we learn what real worship is all about, what real fellowship is like, how discipleship helps us to grow and become like Jesus Christ, how all of us are called to serve in ministry. Those were the four purpose we found in the last four weeks.

1) Our purpose in life: to tell Good News

Today we come to the fifth purpose for our lives. We're going back to the Great Commission, the final mission

Jesus gave to his followers just before he returned to heaven.

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."

"Go and make disciples." What is a disciple? Someone who follows Jesus Christ. How do you make a disciple? By introducing someone to Jesus. By telling them the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ.

Our fifth purpose in life is to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. There's a word for this, and it's often misunderstood, just like some of the other words we've looked at in this series – words like worship, fellowship and ministry. The word is "evangelism."

There's one thing that both Christians and non-Christians have in common, and that is that neither of them like that word. It makes us think about guys on TV with their hair slicked back, who shout real loud and say "send me your money." Or we think of someone who is pushy and arrogant, who corners you and demands, "Are you saved? Have you been washed in the blood of the Lamb?" No one likes people like that.

But that's not what evangelism is. Evangelism is just the Greek word for "telling good news." That's all it is. Something wonderful has happened in your life, and you want to tell others about it, so they can see for themselves. That's evangelism: sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Did you hear the story about the good news and the bad news? First the bad news: A man fell out of an airplane.

- The good news: He had a parachute.
- The bad news: It didn't work.
- The good news: There was a haystack below him.
- The bad news: There was a pitchfork in the haystack.
- The good news: He missed the pitchfork.
- The bad news: He missed the haystack.

Now you may be asking yourself, "Why in the world would I want to talk with someone about Jesus Christ? Religion is one of those things that are hard to talk about."

I'll answer that in two ways. First, the motive, and then the message.

2) The motive for evangelism: love for others

Look at it this way: why doesn't God take you to heaven the moment you become a follower of Jesus Christ? Have you ever thought about that? Why does God leave you here on earth? I mean, heaven is perfect. Here in this life we face problems and trials, sin and temptation and all kinds of stuff. Why doesn't God, the moment I say, "Lord, I'm on your team," instantly take me to heaven? Well, there are only two things you cannot do in heaven. I'll count to five and let you think what they might be...

You can sing in heaven, pray in heaven, fellowship in heaven, serve God in heaven, rest in heaven. There are only two things you can't do in heaven. One of them is sin. The other thing is find someone who doesn't know Jesus and tell them the Good News about God's love. Now, of those two, which one do you think is the reason you're still alive?

Colossians 1:6, New Living Translation:

This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is changing lives everywhere, just as it changed yours that very first day you heard and understood the truth about God's great kindness to sinners.

If someone hadn't told you about Jesus, who knows what your life would be like right now? You could still be back in the old grind, living for the next dollar or whatever, instead of living for God, and having life with real meaning.

Do you know how much God cares about your neighbours, your co-workers who don't know the Lord? This much (arms stretched out). Jesus Christ was stretched out on the cross dying a cruel death, and he says this is how much I love the people around you.

If you want God's blessing on your life, you must care about what God cares about most. And you know what God cares about more than anything else? People.

If I had the cure for cancer, believe me, I'd be shouting it on the street. It would be criminal to keep it a secret. But I have something even more important than that: the way to new life with Jesus. I'm thankful that someone cared enough about me to tell me the good news about Jesus. Now I must care about others.

That's the motive for evangelism: because we love people. We want the very best for them. Now for the message.

3) The message of evangelism: telling my story

Who am I supposed to share the good news with? Let's see what else Jesus said as he was leaving his disciples.

Acts 1:8, New Revised Standard Version:

"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

When Jesus told this to his followers, do you know where they were living? Their home was now in Jerusalem. So he is saying, "First I want you to tell people at home. I want you to start with the people closest to you right there in your own community."

"Then I want you to go to Judea – not just your own town, but the entire region around you." Samaria was the province right next door to Judea, but they were very different culturally. So Jesus is saying, "I want you to go outside your comfort zone, and take the good news to groups of people you don't normally associate with." Finally he says, "I want you to go to the ends of the earth. I want you to go reach everybody else."

So that's who we talk with about Jesus: everyone; but we start with the people who are close by. Start thinking who this might be for you:

- people in your family
- co-workers
- neighbours
- friends

But this is exactly where a lot of people gulp and say, "Oh no, I can't talk religion with so-and-so." No one is talking about religion. We're talking about a relationship. It's as ordinary as saying to someone, "I'd like you to meet my friend." You can say, "I'd love for you to meet my friend, Jesus. He's terrific, and I think you'd like him, too."

Notice in that passage: Jesus didn't say, "You will be my defence attorney." You don't have to defend Jesus. You don't have to get into arguments about Jesus. He doesn't say, "You will be my salesperson." You don't have to sell Jesus. You don't have to pressure people into signing the deal.

All God wants you to do is be a witness. And what is a witness? A witness is just somebody who tells what they have seen. "I saw this, and then I saw this; and this is what happened. I saw it with my own eyes; it happened in my own life."

Here is a simple tool you can use to help you share the Good News. God wants us to R-E-A-C-H out to others with his love.

- R** Reveal you're a Christian. Maybe the people around you don't even know this about you.
- E** Extend an invitation. Invite somebody to come to church with you. They'll be loved, just as they are.
- A** Ask if it's OK to share your story.
- C** Communicate the why and the how you became a Christian.
- H** Help your friend to know Christ personally. If he or she says, "I wish I could have what you've got," tell them it's easy. You can lead them in a prayer like this:

"Lord, I'm sorry for the wrong things that I've done in my life. I thank you for Jesus giving his life for me on the cross, so that I can be forgiven. Fill me with your Holy Spirit, and help me now to live for you. I want to love you, serve you and follow you all my life. Amen."

Give them a book to help them grow in their faith. I don't know of any better book than the one we've been using, *The Purpose Driven Life*. We've got a few left over; you could take one, and be ready to give it away to someone who could use it.

Think again about that list of people. Think of a few whom you really care about, and would like for them to have the same love, joy, peace and eternal hope in their life that you've experienced. Write their names down somewhere, and start praying for them. Pray for an opportunity to share your faith. God will open doors in truly wonderful ways.

The most dangerous prayer you can pray is "Lord, use me." I dare you to say it. Do you have enough courage to say, "Lord, use my life?" Watch what happens! Little becomes much when you put it in the Master's hand.

Let's bow our heads and do that right now.