

## “What On Earth Am I Here For?”

Sermon Series on *Tough Questions*

A Sermon Preached at First Presbyterian Church

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(Ps. 139:1-18)

Dr. Hugh Moorhead teaches philosophy at Northeastern Illinois University. Several years ago he wrote to 250 of the best-known philosophers and intellectuals of the day, and he asked them a simple question: "What is the meaning of life?" He published their responses in a book entitled *The Meaning of Life According to Our Century's Greatest Writers and Thinkers*. Some of those who contributed to the book offered guesses. Others admitted that they made up a purpose. Still others wrote him back and said, "Dr. Moorhead, if you have an answer to this question, would you please let us know?"<sup>1</sup>

Have you ever sat and asked yourself the question, "What is the purpose of my life?" Have you ever wondered, "What on earth am I here for?" When I was in college, I read Viktor Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning*. It was first published in 1946, and it's the story of Frankl's personal experiences in a Nazi concentration camp in WW2 and his observations about how people coped with the atrocities of the Nazi regime in different ways.

He observed that people responded differently to the horrors of life in Auschwitz depending on their belief system, or their worldview. He also put forth in the book his own philosophy of life and introduced a new method of psychoanalysis called "logotherapy." What struck me most about Frankl's book was the way in which everyone is searching for meaning and purpose in life, even in the midst of the worst of circumstances.

We're all on a quest. We're all searching for meaning and purpose in life. The world expresses this search and seeks an answer to it in a variety of different ways. For example, some people try to find meaning and purpose in **the quest for pleasure**. They think that their whole purpose in life is to party and have fun. They seek and do things which bring them pleasure, and they try to avoid those things that don't. "Eat, drink, and be merry" is the slogan they live by. There was an article in *Time* magazine a while ago that said young people are growing up today with the idea that the world owes them pleasure. Is it any wonder? That's the message we hear most often everyday in advertising and from the media.

Even our Christian experience can be twisted into thinking that pleasure and personal happiness is the goal of the Christian life. Biblical scholar Robert

Wuthnow who teaches at Princeton has written, "At one time theologians argued that the chief purpose of humankind was to glorify God. Now it would seem that the logic has been reversed: the chief purpose of God is to gratify humankind. Spirituality no longer is true or good because it meets absolute standards of truth or goodness, but because it helps me get along. I am the judge of its worth. If it helps me find a vacant parking space, I know my spirituality is on the right track. If it leads me into the wilderness, calling me to face dangers I would rather not deal with at all, then it is a form of spirituality I am unlikely to choose."<sup>2</sup>

Other people think that meaning and purpose is found in **achievement and recognition**. We strive to get good grades, we work long hours at the office, we exercise to the point of exhaustion, all in an effort to achieve and be recognized for our accomplishments. "That's a nice tan you have." "Been working on your abs lately?" "Hey, congratulations on the new promotion!" Titles become important to us, academic degrees solidify our standing, and we like to see our name in lights. We also love to hear the praise of others.

When achievement becomes our focus in life, we discover sooner or later that the ladder of success has been leaning against the wrong wall, and the things we thought would bring us satisfaction, such as achievement, don't offer the fulfillment we thought they would. There is a price we pay for achievement, and success and fame have trappings of their own. Many people on the top of the heap feel very empty and lonely, and they wonder if there is more to life than just working hard.

Finally, there is **the quest for love**. Some people believe that meaning and purpose in life is found in finding someone to love. They think, "If I can just meet the right person, and if we can have some kids of our own and make a family, then my life will have meaning and purpose."

Next week is Valentine's Day. It's become a billion dollar industry because all of us are searching for love. However, many people give away the most precious parts of their body and soul thinking that love will come their way in exchange only to end up with a broken heart when they have been used up and discarded. Or they put their hopes and dreams in getting married and having a family only to discover that marriage is a whole lot harder than they ever imagined, and being a parent is the toughest job on the planet.

Well, if our search for meaning and purpose can't ultimately be found in the quest for pleasure, achievement, or love, where can we find meaning in our lives? Several years ago, Rick Warren wrote the book *The Purpose Driven Life*. It's sold more than 30 million copies in the last 15 years. Warren opens his book by writing, "It's not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater

than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born *by* His purpose and *for* His purpose.”<sup>3</sup>

Warren suggests that most people have a problem with finding their purpose in life because they begin at the wrong starting point. We ask self-centered questions like, What do *I* want to be? What should *I* do with my life? What are *my* goals, *my* ambitions, and *my* dreams for my future? But he says focusing on ourselves will never reveal our life’s purpose, and he quotes Job 12:10 where it says, “*It is God who directs the lives of His creatures; everyone’s life is in His power.*”

Contrary to what many popular books, movies and seminars tell you, you won’t discover your life’s meaning by looking within yourself. Maybe you’ve already tried that and have discovered it doesn’t work. The reason this doesn’t work is because you didn’t create yourself, so there is no way you can tell yourself what you were created for!

If I handed you an invention you had never seen before, you wouldn’t know its purpose, and the invention itself wouldn’t be able to tell you either. Only the creator, or the owner’s manual written by the creator, could reveal the purpose of the invention. The same is true with people, because we were created by God.

You and I were made *by* God, and we were made *for* God. We were put here on this earth for God’s purposes, and until we understand that, life will never make sense. In the passage we’ve read together this morning, the psalmist David says that each one of us is fearfully and wonderfully made. God knit us together in our mother’s wombs, and our frame was not hidden from Him when we were made in the secret place. It says that God knows us so well that before a word is even on our tongues, He has full knowledge of it already. All the days of our lives were ordained before one of them came into being. You are not an accident; you were created by God, and you were created for Him. God loves you, and He wants to give you meaning and purpose.

Rick Warren says that there are at least **five purposes** every person has in life. **First**, he says **you were planned for God’s pleasure**. The moment you were born into the world, God was there as an unseen witness, and He was smiling at your birth. He didn’t need to create you, but He chose to do so for His own joy and pleasure. You exist for His benefit, His glory, His purpose, and His delight.

Bringing joy to God and living for His pleasure, is the first purpose of your life. When you begin to fully understand this truth, you will never have a problem again with feeling insignificant. You bring pleasure to God unlike anything else He has ever created.

The **second purpose** in life is that **we were formed for God’s family**. God wants a family, and He created you to become a part of it. The entire Bible is the story of God building a family He loves, and that will love Him, honor Him, and

reign with Him forever. Because God is love, He treasures relationships, especially with his children.

In the Bible God identifies Himself in family terms – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and you and I are invited to join and participate in this tri-unity relationship of love through Christ. When we place our faith in Jesus, God becomes our heavenly Father, we become His children, other believers are our brothers and sisters, and the church is our spiritual family. And the family of God includes all believers in the past, the present, and the future. It's a big family!

Warren says the **third purpose** is that **you were created to become like Christ**. From the beginning of time, God's plan has been to make you like His Son, Jesus. God announced this intention at creation when He said, "*Let us make human beings in our image and likeness*" (Gen. 1:28). In all of creation, only human beings are made in the image of God. But as you know, the Bible says that this image was marred when our first parents sinned in the Garden of Eden, and as a result you and I are in need of help to restore the fullness and goodness of God's image in each of us. The Bible says that Jesus is "*the exact likeness of God, ...the visible image of the invisible God, ...and the exact representation of His being*" (2Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).

Becoming like Christ is a long and slow process, and spiritual transformation and spiritual maturity is neither instant nor automatic. It's a gradual, progressive development that will take the rest of your life. So we're all a work in progress. But the Bible promises "*He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 1:6).

The **fourth purpose** of your life is that **you were shaped for God's service**. You weren't created just to be a consumer – to eat, breathe, and take up space. Instead, God designed you to make a difference with your life. While many of the best-selling books offer advice on how to *get* the most out of life, that's not the reason God made you. You were created to *add* to life on earth, not just to take from it. God wants you to give something back, and you were created to serve God and to serve other people.

The **final purpose** about which Rick Warren writes is **you were made for a mission**. God is at work in the world, and He wants you to join Him in this holy task – this mission. Our English word "mission" comes from the Latin word for "sending." Being a Christian includes being sent into the world as a representative of Jesus Christ. Our Lord told His disciples at the end of His ministry on earth, "*As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you*" (Jn. 20:21). So your mission is actually a continuation of Jesus' mission on earth through the power of His Holy Spirit.

Someday at the end of time, there will be an enormous crowd of people in heaven. Folks from every race, tribe, nation and language will be gathered around

the throne of God, and they will be praising Him and enjoying all the good things God has prepared for those that know and love and follow Jesus Christ. And at that time our mission for God will be complete, and there will be joy in heaven.

This is the pentathlon of the Christian life. These are the five purposes of every human being. You were planned for God's pleasure; you were formed for God's family; you were created to become like Christ; you were shaped for God's service; and you were made for God's mission. You and I will only find joy and fulfillment in life when we discover and begin to live into these purposes for which God made us. And there is no greater felling in the world than living in the center of His will and being able to say, "This is what I was made for!" Ask God to show you His purpose for your life.

The week before my late wife Lorie died last year, you may recall that she dictated a letter for me to send to the congregation to thank all of you for the love and the support you provided her and you provided us as we battled her cancer the last two years. In that letter she wrote the following words:

The purpose of my life has been to love and follow Jesus and to serve Him with all my heart, and my special passion and calling from God has been to help children in poverty around the world. I have been so fortunate and blessed to serve the least, the last, and the lost of the world, and I'm eager to see God's global church in heaven when I get there. I wanted to run a long race in my service to Christ (Hebrews 12), but that did not happen. My body wouldn't cooperate, and the medicines didn't work for me. Nevertheless, God has blessed me so much, and I've learned so many lessons. And God has shown me that now He has a different purpose for my life. It is a purpose that will take me to heaven. Farewell. I love you all.

There are few people I know in this world who have had a clearer understanding of what their purpose in life was, or who lived that purpose more fully. Whenever I think of my dear wife, it inspires me to want to live with that same kind of purpose and that same kind of focus and dedication. And I invite you to join me in following her example.

What on earth am I here for? God has told us everything we need to know in this book, the Bible. So let's join together in discovering and living out our God-given purpose to the glory of God and for the blessing of others. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh S. Moorhead, *The Meaning of Life According to Our Century's Greatest Writers and Thinkers*.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Wuthnow. Source unknown.

<sup>3</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, p. 17.