

21 February 2010

The Purpose Driven Life – Part 2 – Planned for God's Pleasure

Readings: Romans 8: 6-11 Matthew 22: 34-40

Last week we began our Lent series '40 Days of Purpose' and I posed three questions:

First, the question of existence – why am I alive? God answers it by saying, "I made you to love you, that's why you're alive."

Secondly, in the question of significance – does my life matter? God says, oh yes you do matter. You matter so much that I have made you for eternity. You're going to be around for a long, long time.

Thirdly, the "question of intention: What is my purpose?" What on earth am I here for?

And I said that's what I'm going to be exploring with you during Lent. Last week I said that you were created to be loved by God. Today, we're going to look at the first of God's five purposes for your life – 'You were made for God's pleasure.'

The Bible says we were created for God's enjoyment, God's pleasure. Revelation 4:12 "*You (God) created everything, and it is for your pleasure that they exist and were created.*"

Those of us who are parents know how much we enjoy watching our kids. Photos, videos to catch the things they say. I have clear, and warm, memories of our own two boys – but I won't embarrass them by recounting stories. However, I did hear this one (and not from my family):

One summer evening during a violent thunderstorm a mother was tucking her son into bed. She was about to turn off the light when he asked with a tremor in his voice, "Mummy, will you sleep in my bed tonight?" His mother gave a reassuring hug and said "I can't dear - I have to sleep in Daddy's room." A long silence was broken at last by his shaky little voice: "The big sissy."

God enjoys watching you be you. You were made for God's pleasure, and the first purpose of our life is that God wants us to love Him back. One day Jesus was asked by a young lawyer, "Lord, what's the most important commandment in the entire Bible?" Jesus replied (today's reading) "*Love the Lord your God. This is the first and greatest commandment.*" (Matthew 22 v 37-38)

Jesus said that the most important thing we can do is to 'Love the Lord your God.' God is to come first in our lives. There's a word for putting God first – and it's a word we misunderstand. "Worship." Worship is knowing and responding to God's love, by loving Him back. The Scottish Catechism asks the question "Why was I created". And gives the answer "I was created in order to worship God and to enjoy him forever".

When I say the word “worship,” what do you think of? Singing? Prayer? Ritual or liturgy or communion or going to church? Even something you do in church. But worship is far, far more than all those things. **‘Worship is knowing and loving God.’**

My first purpose in life is to **worship God**. It’s your primary objective. It’s your highest priority. It is your number one purpose in life. We’re going to talk about what that means today because, as I said, unfortunately, worship is misunderstood. Nothing is as important as loving God.

Paul, writing to the Romans, puts it in a challenging – but really very clear – way: Romans 12: 1 *“Because of God’s great mercy to us... offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to His service and pleasing to Him.”* This verse reminds us that worship is pleasing to God. The key word in this verse is the word **‘offer’**. Offering ourselves, and all we have, is at the heart of our worship.

Worship is – first - **our response** to God’s love. As this verse says, we worship *“because of God and of his great mercy for us”*. God always makes the first move. God doesn’t ever ask you to make the first move. He creates us. He saves us. He forgives us. He blesses us. He protects us. It’s because of all these things that God has done for us that we worship Him.

Worship is – second - **giving back** to God. The prayer we sometimes say over the gifts at the Offertory: ‘All things come from you, O God and of your own do we give you’. Whenever we give back to God that’s called worship. And that brings pleasure to God. When our children are grateful to us, as parents, that brings us pleasure. Whenever we’re grateful to our Heavenly Father, that brings pleasure to Him.

When it says, *“offer”*, what are we supposed to offer to God who has created everything? We give Him the only thing we can give - and that is our heart, our love. It’s the line in the Christmas Carol ‘In the bleak midwinter’ – what can I give Him? Give my heart.

And He’s very specific about how to give it. In Mark 12 it says, *“Love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and all your **soul**, all your **mind**, and all your **strength**.”* This verse, by the way, is the memory verse for this week in 40 days.

This verse tells us that God wants us to love Him in three ways: thoughtfully, passionately, practically.

First, God wants me to love Him thoughtfully. “Love Him with all your mind.”

Worship is focusing our attention on God. In some eastern faiths – and I include Yoga here – the essence is about trying to clear your mind of everything and focus within yourself. But that’s not what God desires. The truth is, God wants us to worship Him **thoughtfully**. It means getting our minds focused on God and not just going through the motions, but really, really thinking what worship is all about. This isn’t always easy to do. It’s all too easy to worship on autopilot. Take prayers here in church. We mutter our way through, and at the end, can’t remember if we actually said it. We may be saying the right words at the right time, but our minds may be elsewhere. Worship is about focusing our attention wholly on God. And we do this because God focuses his attention on us.

Look at what the Bible has to say to us in Psalm 139 verses 1 - 3. *“You have looked deep into my heart, Lord, and You know all about me. You know when I am resting or when I am working. You notice everything I do and everywhere I go.”*

God shows His love for us by caring for our needs. All those who love us want our attention. Our spouses, our children and especially God - all want our attention. Dare I suggest that the biggest single cause of breakdown in relationships is a loss of communication, of focusing our attention. To give another our time, our attention, is our way of showing them our love.

Think about being in love. Especially the first flush of being in love. You just couldn’t get that person off your mind - you thought about them when you woke up in the morning. You thought about them all day long. You planned when to speak to them, be with them. That relationship was so dominant in your thinking, your time, your focus. Your first love may have lasted only briefly, but it taught you about the feelings of love.

A woman said to her husband ‘you never tell me you love me’. He replied ‘I did once – and if it changes, I’ll let you know’. We like to be told, to be shown, to be reassured, we’re loved. Yet often we’ll blow hot and cold in our demonstration of our love, our feelings.

Compare God - His love for us is eternal. His attention is always focused on us, and He wants to teach us to focus our hearts and our attention on Him. The easiest thing to do in life is to lose our focus. We’re not like modern auto-focus cameras, you point it at something and it automatically focuses on what picture you’re taking. We have to decide to focus. We have to choose to focus on things.

There are two things that distract us from focusing our attention on God. First, we are self-centered by nature. And the second thing is, we live in a self-centered culture.

Romans 8:7 (today's Epistle) says, *"Focusing on yourself is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, and ends up thinking more about self than God."*

So we have to decide to focus on Him. Romans 12:2, *"Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God."*

We must choose - choose to stop thinking about some things – and ourselves - and start thinking about God. To do this it's important to find time each day, just a few minutes during the day, to make space for God. It doesn't matter when you do it – it may be at beginning of the day, in the middle, or at end of the day, when you decide you're going to stop everything else and just be with God. You've heard me say before how I valued my walk across Hyde Park each morning when I worked in London – my prayer-walk time. I have a friend who sits in a particular chair, immediately after breakfast. On Growing Leaders we've looked at Mark's Gospel, Jesus 'taking time out'. In 40 Days we're reminded of Matthew 6: 6: *"Find a quiet secluded place, so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense His grace."*

Find a quiet place, where you can simply and honestly be with God. Just be yourself. Don't try to be spiritual and behave differently for God.

But we are also told in Psalm 105, verse 4, *"Worship him continually."* Let me say again: worship isn't singing, isn't coming to church. Our whole lives are to be an act of worship in what we say and do. There may be times when we set apart time and space to be consciously with God – to come away quietly - but it is in how we live that is the true focus of our worship. Imagine spending every minute with Jesus. We'd be aware of his presence, we'd whisper to him, we'd laugh and joke and comment, we'd show our exasperation. Arrow prayers, and awareness of God's continual presence with us in all we do encourages us to walk closer to God. It is a way of life that becomes more and more natural for us as we grow in faith – just as breathing is done without thinking.

When we focus on ourselves, the inevitable results are worry, insecurity, anxiety, guilt, fear, discouragement. But when that focus shifts from us to God, all of a sudden, we begin to sense gratitude and hope and confidence and love. Focusing our lives on God has incredible benefits. Isaiah 26: 3 *"You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on You!"*

Secondly, God wants us to love Him passionately – with all your heart and soul.

Worship is not only focusing our attention on God, it's also **expressing our affection** to God. This is loving God with **your heart and soul**. And for some of us, this is difficult because we grew up in

families where we weren't encouraged to express anything affectionate, they didn't say 'I love you' a lot. Perhaps we may be the kind of silent type. For many of us it's not really easy to express our affection to God because it is not something we have found easy to do even within our own families.

Somehow we need to learn how to say "I love you" to God for all that he has done for us. Do you remember the first time you ever said 'I love you' to somebody? Probably you were nervous...are they going to laugh? Be dismissive? Say the same back? It's risky to say, "I love you." But the marvelous thing about God is He's taken away the risk. He said it first. God has said it in a thousand ways. He created us. He's taken care of us. Even when we didn't know it, He was showing us His love. 1 John 4: 19 "*We love Him, because He first loved us.*"

And God **wants to be** loved. In Hosea 6, God says, "*I don't want your sacrifices -- I want your love! I don't want your offerings - I want you to know me!*" 'I want you to love me, to know me'. That is the first purpose of your life - **to know and love God**. That's the most important thing in life. That's worship.

In Exodus 34: 14 it says "*He is the God who is passionate about his relationship with you.*"

"Passionate." God is passionate about you. He wants your desire. God doesn't want -- "Oh, okay. I better go worship." "Oh, I love you, God" [*said in a monotone voice*]. God doesn't want duty. He doesn't want ritual and religion and rules and regulation. He wants a relationship. And He's passionate about it! He says, "I want you to love Me as much as I love you, because I made you and I created you." This is hard for some of you because in our stiff-upper-lip British culture we tend not to be naturally expressive people. But God longs to know you. He longs for you to know Him. He longs passionately for you to have a relationship with Him. So why are we ignoring Him in so many areas of our lives?

A simple way to build our relationship and express our affection to God is by just saying "thank you." All of us have so much to thank God for: our food, clothes, homes and our family and friends, life itself. Little things that we take for granted.

The wedding season is about to start for me. There were two of old men talking at the bar. One of them had been married for 66 years. "Amazing. 66 years!" said his friend. "What's the secret to such a long, happy marriage?" "Well," he replied, "It's like this. The man makes all the big decisions ... and the woman just makes the little decisions." "Really?" his friend replied. "Does it really work?" "Oh, yes," he said proudly. "66 years, and so far, not one big decision!"

Two people declare their love for each other – Will you...? And they each say ‘I will.’ ‘All that I am I give to you’. They are saying “I give you my life. All that I have I share with you until death.” They commit themselves to one another in love. Why? Because that’s the essence of love. You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. You have to give. So when you say, “God, I want to express my love to You,” you say, “I give You my heart. I give You my soul. My soul is in Your hand. I want You to take my life.” That’s the greatest way to express your love to God.

Romans 6: 13 *“Give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life.”* Again, remember, it’s always a response. God gave us life, then He gives new life in Jesus. God wants us to give ourselves completely back to Him. So what holds us back? Why do you not give your life completely to God? Well, I’ll tell you, it is one word -- f-e-a-r. You’re scared to death. You’re afraid to give your life to God because “if I give my life completely to God, is He going to turn me into some kind of religious nutcase?” “I’ll become one of those fanatics that I see on some of those TV channels” Every time you stub your toe, you think you have to say “Praise the Lord!”

I don’t think so! God made you to be you. He made you the way you are. God doesn’t want to you turn into some nut or fanatic or some religious zealot. He wants you to be you. In fact, you’re not fully you until you’ve got God in your life. You’re just existing. You’re not living the glory of God as a human being fully alive. And the more you know God and the more you love God, the more normal you become, and the more you become what God meant for you to be in the first place. But it is fear that keeps us from giving ourselves completely to God.

And Thirdly, God says, I want you to love me practically – with all your strength and with your abilities.

The truth is that even though God created the entire world and the universe and He created you, there are three things God does not have unless you give them to Him:

1. He doesn’t have your attention unless you give it to Him. That’s loving God with your mind.
2. He doesn’t have your affection, unless you give it to Him. That’s loving God with your heart and your soul.
3. And God doesn’t have your ability, unless you give it to Him. That’s loving God with your strength.

Whenever you take the things God has given to you and you give them back to God, that is the heart of worship. And **using our abilities for God** is loving God with all our **strength**.

At home, we express our love to our spouses, our children not only by saying ‘I love you’ but by showing it practically. Doing the household chores, mending things and using our abilities to help

the family do things. This is showing our love for them in practical ways – fixing, helping, serving, sharing, those kinds of things. And that’s part of worship, too.

Paul wrote to the Colossians 3:23 *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for people.”*

This verse can absolutely revolutionise your life. Look at it again. *“Whatever you do”* – that means anything – *“work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for people.”*

This rather blows the concept of ‘full-time Christian service’ as if ordination, charity work, whatever is somehow different from office work, being a mechanic, teaching, whatever. To worship more, you just change who you’re working for. And when you change who you’re working for, your work becomes worship. Many people compartmentalise their lives saying, “Okay, here’s my worship. I go to church once a week. Maybe I go to a small group once a week, and maybe I have a daily time where I’m reading a little bit every day about God and trying to learn from Him, and that’s my worship. And then over here, I’ve got my career and then over here I’ve got my social life. No. God says ‘I want you to invite me into every area of your life.’

All of your work can be turned to worship. Many years ago I read several books by Neville Shute, and (as I recall) in one he described an aircraft mechanic who always made absolutely sure everything was exactly right, because he said he was working as if directly for God. His friends nick-named him ‘Harpic’, because they said he was clean round the bend. So in whatever you do, say “I’m going to do this as if I’m doing it for you, God.” It really doesn’t matter what you do. It’s Who you do it for. A lot of people get hung up on this and ask, “What is God’s will for my career? God, should I do this or do that?” God says, “I wired you up in a certain way to have certain interests. Why don’t you do what you’re interested in doing?” God wants to know, “Are you doing it for Me?” whatever you’re doing.

And that turns our work into worship, and then you’re worshipping God 24 hours a day. Not just in church. God doesn’t want worship to be just a church thing. He wants it to be your whole life, to worship God with your life.

Notice this next verse, I love this paraphrase in the Message, it says in Romans 12: 1 *“Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, your eating, your going to work, your walking-around life – and place it before God as an Offering.”*

There's that word again. We said "offer" is the essence of worship. I'm offering my life to you. Real purpose-driven living doesn't happen in a church. It doesn't even happen in a small group. It doesn't even happen in your personal time or quiet time with God every day, of prayer and reading the Bible. It happens in the ordinary, routine, mundane, things of real life wherever you go. Everything can be turned into an act of worship. Notice, "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart,*" putting your *heart* and *soul* in it, as though you were working for the Lord.

The truth is everybody worships something. You were wired to worship, by God. He put it in your DNA. You couldn't stop worshipping if you had to, because it is part of being a human. Everybody worships something. That's why you can go to any culture in the world and find people worshipping. If you don't worship God you're going to find something, even if it is just yourself.

Now, the greatest mistake you can make in life is to miss your primary purpose. So let me ask you a question, what do you think about most? Because whatever you think about most is what you love the most. What do you think about when you just let your mind drift? When you let it wander, what does it naturally gravitate towards? Whatever that is, is what you worship.

Did you know that your credit card and your diary are theological documents? They tell you what you love, because the way you spend your time and the way you spend your money shows what you love the most.

The Bible says you were planned for God's pleasure. You were made to know and love God. So I challenge you to get to know and love God before anything else, because that brings Him pleasure. St. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5: 9 "*So we make it our goal to please Him.*" There's no better goal in life than that one. To give God pleasure.

Let us pray ...

"Dear God, I wouldn't even exist if it weren't for you. Forgive me for all the times I think and act like You don't matter. Today I've realized You made me to love me and that the first purpose of my life is to know and love You back. I'm amazed that You long for a relationship with me and I'm amazed You're interested in the details of my life. But most of all, I'm amazed You would come to earth to die for me. I don't understand it at all. Please forgive me, God, for not worshipping You. I want to learn how to focus my attention on You throughout my day. I want to turn my work into worship. I want to learn to love you with a love that You deserve, thoughtfully with my mind, passionately with my heart and soul and practically with my abilities. When I go back to work on Monday, I'm going to be working for You, doing my job as if You are the boss."

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