



40 Days of Purpose

Week 1 – What on Earth Am I Here For?

Notes: This Bible Study is taken from the 40 Days of Purpose Weekly Lessons guide available from www.purposedriven.com. The Scripture references in this Bible study are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

For the next six weeks we will seek to more fully understand God's purposes for our lives.

I. 40 DAYS OF PURPOSE INTRODUCTION

The message our Pastor gave last week was a preview to what is intended for you to have read this week: the first seven chapters from the book, *"The Purpose Driven Life"* written by the Senior Pastor of Saddleback Church, Rick Warren. These short daily devotionals, written especially for this 40-day emphasis, will reinforce and expand on what you're learning from our pastor and what you're learning in this class or small group study. I'm going to covering the material you should have read during the previous week.

Additionally, the Bible urges us to remember God's Word so we can live lives with purpose. So we'll be memorizing a Scripture verse each week related to the particular purpose God has for your life. Even if you've never tried to memorize a Bible verse before, I hope you try this. No habit will do more for your spiritual growth than memorizing Scripture.

This series on the *Purpose Driven Life* has been designed for group study and interaction. I don't want you to just listen and then go home. I want you to discuss what we talk about each week, dialogue with each other, consider the implications, and plan some action steps as a result. The more you get involved and participate, the more benefit you'll receive from this spiritual growth series in the next six weeks.

II. WEEK 1 INTRODUCTION

I heard about a first grader who asked his mother "Mom, where did I come from?" The mother took a deep breath and began a long, detailed explanation of the birds and the bees: how our bodies differ, conception, birth, etc. After about 30 minutes of listening to this, the bored first grader said, "Oh. Well Jimmy says he comes from San Diego and I was just

wondering where I came from." The mother said, "I had this sinking feeling I was answering the wrong question!"

Sometimes we do the same thing as Christians. We answer questions no one is really interested in. But I can guarantee you that during the next six weeks, we're going to focus on questions everyone is interested in: What on earth am I here for? What is the purpose of my life? Why did God make me and what am I supposed to be doing with my life?

This is not a new question. In fact, thousands of years ago, Solomon asked it. In Ecclesiastes 7:24 (TEV) he asks, *"How can anyone discover the meaning of life?"*

What is the answer to Solomon's question?

God has made it possible for us to know the meaning of life through His Word, and by indwelling us with His Holy Spirit who helps us to understand His Word.

Why do you think people allow themselves to simply pass through this life without ever discovering the purpose for which they were made?

They keep busy working, raising a family, paying bills, living for weekends, and then leave this life without ever knowing the answer to (or maybe even asking) the question, "Why do I exist?" They have been duped by the world into thinking that this life is all there is. They have bought into the deception that after you are dead, it is all over.

In the next five sessions we're going to discover God's five purposes for creating us. We'll look at one purpose each week. In this introductory session, I want to do two things:

1. First, point out the **consequences** of not taking time to understand the purpose of life.
2. Second, point out the incredible **benefits** of knowing your purpose and living a purpose driven life.

A. The Consequences of Not Knowing Your Purpose

To see an example of the negative effects of not knowing your purpose, all we have to do is read the first chapter of Ecclesiastes. For years, Solomon did not understand his purpose in life, and he was miserable. He tells us that if we fail to discover the meaning of life, we'll experience three consequences.

1. Without knowing your purpose, life will seem TIRESOME.

What does Ecclesiastes 1:5-8 say that your life will be like if you don't know your purpose?

Ecclesiastes 1:5-8 (TEV) - *"The sun still rises and it still goes down...the wind blows... round and round and back again. Every river flows into the sea... [then] the water returns to where the rivers began, and starts all over again. Everything leads to weariness...."*

Without purpose, life will just wear you out! You'll lose your energy, spark, and motivation. Without knowing your purpose, life will seem TIRESOME.

What kinds of things will we be doing in life if we have no purpose?

Without purpose, we seem to be spinning our wheels, running in circles, doing the same thing over and over with no progress. Life becomes a treadmill where we use up a lot of energy, but don't really go anywhere. At the end of every day we drop into bed exhausted and wonder, *"What's the purpose of it all?"*

This is illustrated by a Dilbert cartoon I have penned up on my bulletin board at work. Dilbert comes home from work and says to Dogbert, "I spent the entire day getting new assignments which left me no time to actually work on anything... Tomorrow I'll spend the entire day explaining why I didn't finish yesterday's work... Sometimes I don't know the difference between me and a hamster on a wheel." Dogbert responds with the difference: "Hamsters don't depress me."

2. Without knowing your purpose, life will seem UNFULFILLING.

What does Ecclesiastes 1:8-9 give us as a second consequence for not knowing your purpose in life?

Ecclesiastes 1:8b-9a (LB) - *"No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied; no matter how much we hear, we're not content. History merely repeats itself. Nothing is truly new...."*

Without purpose, you'll never be satisfied. You'll always be wrestling with discontent. Without knowing your purpose, life will seem UNFULFILLING.

Why do people generally seem so restless?

People are always on the move to the next thing, they are never satisfied. If you've never noticed this, just hand someone a TV remote control! A recent study predicted the average person will change channels 350,000 times in his or her lifetime. We'll never be satisfied or at peace until we know our purpose.

3. Without knowing your purpose, life will seem UNCONTROLLABLE.

What does Ecclesiastes 1:15 give us as a third consequence for not knowing your purpose in life?

Ecclesiastes 1:15 (TEV) - *"You can't straighten out what is crooked; you can't count things that aren't there!"*

What in the world is he talking about? He's referring to situations beyond our control! Without knowing your purpose, life will seem UNCONTROLLABLE.

Have you ever tried to straighten out something permanently crooked—like a relationship that just refused to be straightened out? Have you ever tried to solve a problem you just couldn't figure out? Have you ever tried to change somebody or a circumstance that refused to change? Some things seem unfixable.

So how do we find purpose in our lives?

When you don't know the point of life, you have just two options:

1. Make Up Your Own or...
2. Discover God's Purpose

How do people make up their own purpose in life?

They try to create meaning through a hobby, sport, craft, career, or something else. Basically they speculate on what life is all about or they adopt someone else's speculation (this is called philosophy).

What is the problem with making your activities your purpose or adopting some speculation about your purpose?

Activities may be fun, and philosophies may answer superficial questions but inside people know there must be more to life than this. Something is missing!

Why is discovering God's purpose superior to making up your own purpose?

God is the creator of life, so He certainly ought to know the meaning and purpose of it! If you want to know the purpose of your life, you must begin with God, not yourself, or what anybody else thinks. You were created for God's purposes.

Ephesians 1:11 (Msg) - *"It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone."*

B. The Benefits of Knowing Your Purpose

Almost 2,000 years ago, a follower of Jesus named Paul was sitting in a prison cell and spoke about the benefits of knowing your purpose. Notice what he says in Philippians 3:12b-14 (NLT):

"...I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. No, dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven."

This is a very important passage of Scripture because Paul shows us four benefits of taking the time to discover the purpose of our lives.

1. Knowing the purpose of your life will give your life focus.

What does Philippians 3:13 give us as the first benefit of knowing the purpose for our life?

Philippians 3:13 - *"...I am focusing all my energies on this one thing...."*

You won't be so scattered and distracted. Knowing the purpose of your life will give your life focus.

Why is it important to have focus in your life?

It's important because focusing your life on your purpose produces incredible power. Purpose is like light. Light diffused has no power at all, while focused light has amazing power. For instance, focusing the light of the sun through a magnifying glass can set a piece of paper on fire. If you focus light even more than that, it becomes a laser that can even cut through steel!

If you don't know your purpose in life, how can focus be a dangerous thing?

Without knowing your purpose, you may focus on the wrong thing. Thoreau said, "Most men live lives of quiet desperation." Similarly, and perhaps more accurately descriptive of today's population, I believe most people live lives of aimless distraction.

2. Knowing the purpose of your life will SIMPLIFY your life.

What else does Philippians 3:13 give us as a benefit of knowing the purpose for our life?

Philippians 3:13 - *"Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead...."*

If you don't know your purpose, you'll have a hard time deciding where you should best invest your time, money, and energy. Trying to live without knowing what God made you for is like driving in a fog; it makes decision making a lot harder. Knowing the purpose of your life will SIMPLIFY your life.

Is it possible to do everything people want you to do?

No, everybody else has a plan for your life.

What does God's Word have to say about our obligation to satisfy everyone?

The Good News is, God doesn't expect you to do it all. He has given you just enough time to fulfill the purposes for which He made you. So when you begin to live a purpose-driven life, you get a saner schedule and your stress goes down... Isaiah 26:3 (TEV) says, *"You, Lord, give perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm."*

3. Knowing the purpose of your life will increase your MOTIVATION in life.

What does Philippians 3:14 give us as the third benefit of knowing the purpose for our life?

Philippians 3:14 (NLT) - *"...I strain to reach the end of the race...."*

He knows what life is all about, and he heads straight for it. A clear objective is motivating. Knowing the purpose of your life will increase your MOTIVATION in life.

In Jeremiah 29:11 (LB) God says, *"'For I know the plans I have for you' says the Lord. 'They are plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.'"* You have no idea the tremendous things God wants to do in your life!

4. Knowing the purpose of your life will PREPARE YOU FOR ETERNITY.

What else does Philippians 3:14 give us as a benefit of knowing the purpose for our life?

Philippians 3:14 (NLT) - *"...receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven."*

If you don't get anything else I say in this session, I want you to understand this: Life on earth is just preparation for eternity! Knowing the purpose of your life will PREPARE YOU FOR ETERNITY.

Life as we know it is not all there is. Life is not a cycle, just going round and round. You have a destiny in eternity. You were made to last forever. One day your heart will stop beating. That will be the end of your time on earth, but it won't be the end of you. You are going to last forever.

Why is what happens to us after we die so much more important than what happens to us in this life?

What you do with your life on earth will determine where you spend eternity. Let's say I had a tape measure that stretched from Los Angeles to New York. If that tape measure represented how long eternity is, the first fraction of an inch would represent the 70 to 90 years you'll be on earth. You'll spend far more time on that side of eternity than on this side.

III. APPLICATION

So given that we will have an eternal existence, what should we do with our lives now?

We are to use this life to prepare for the next one. The life we're living today is the dress rehearsal for the real show. It's the warm up, the trial run, the preparation lap before the real race begins. The Bible says, in Ecclesiastes 3:11a (NIV) "*He has ...set eternity in the hearts of men.*" Psalm 33:11 (TEV) says, "*...His purposes last eternally.*" It's an understatement to say God has long-range plans for your life.

A. Do you have a relationship with God?

One day, God will do an audit of your life. You'll stand before God and He'll ask you, "What did you do with My Son Jesus Christ?" and "What did you do with your life?" During the next five weeks, I'll help you prepare for the second question.

However, before we end this introductory session, I want to make sure you know how to answer the first question. Do you have a relationship with Jesus Christ? If you aren't sure of this, I'd like the privilege of leading you in a prayer to settle this issue. Let's bow our heads. I'm going to pray a prayer and you can follow it silently in your mind:

Dear God, I want to know Your purpose for my life. I don't want to waste the rest of my life on the wrong things. Today I want to take the first step in preparing for eternity by getting to know You. Jesus Christ, I don't understand it all, but as much as I know how, I want to open my life to You. I ask you to come into my life and make yourself real to me. Use this series in my life to help me know what You made me for. Thank you. Amen.

If you just prayed that prayer for the very first time, I congratulate you. You've just become a part of the family of God. The first thing you ought to do is share your decision with someone else. If you feel comfortable doing so, I hope you'll share it with the people you're with right now.

B. Group discussion

We've been having a group discussion but I would like you to consider the introspective questions give here for small group discussion.

Please note the following corrections in the Sunday School Study Guide:

Page 9: Delete the signature line at the bottom. It is in the correct location on page 10.

Page 10: Replace Question 3 with the following: "God uses other people in specific ways in our lives. In whose life does God want to use you? Now is a great time to consider who you might invite to next week's class."

I also recommend inviting a friend to next week's study. We'll be covering the very first purpose for which God created us.

Here are some additional discussion questions we may consider if we have time:

1. What is one thing I learned today that really hit me hard?
2. What truth did I realize today that I haven't seen until now?
3. What is the one thing about the *40 Days of Purpose* that scares me the most?
4. What might my life look like when freed from my old self?
5. What do I want?