

## *What am I Supposed to do?*

Can you solve this little riddle: What can be absolutely empty when it is completely full? The answer is “life”! Life can be so full of busyness that we are booked a year in advance. It can be filled to the brim with tasks to accomplish, places to go, relationships to maintain and promises to keep; yet it can be painfully empty on the inside. In one way or another every generation has echoed the pathetic words of Ecclesiastics 1:2: “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!” These words are credited to Solomon, the wisest, richest, most married man in all of history; yet he bemoaned the meaninglessness of life.

It’s strange that one’s life can have so much and be so empty all at the same time. There can be a sense of purposelessness or an inability to make important choices and, even when the choices are made, there can be inconsistency that flip-flops back and forth from one extreme to the other. You see it in the teenager who wonders what to do at the end of high school, the college student who can’t pick a major, the worker who floats from job to job. You can see it in the businessperson who finds no fulfillment in a successful career, the homemaker who manages the house and raises the children yet on too many days wonders why and whether or not it makes any difference. You can see it in the person paralyzed by positive possibilities; he or she has a dozen good choices to pick from but can’t decide which one to choose.

What we’re talking about here is one of the most significant issues facing the inside us. It is the question: What am I supposed to do with my life? A couple of ideas may help to answer this question.

The first idea has to do with the power of purpose. In our English language there are only six questions we can ask of anything: Who? What? Where? Why? When? How? Every question either directly or indirectly must begin with one of

these words. While they are all important, one is the biggest question of all. It is the “why” question because out of that question flow all the other questions and all the other answers. If we can figure “why” we are then ready to decide who, what, where, when and how.

Let me give you a practical example of this. Suppose one Saturday morning your old car won’t start and you decide to go shopping for a new one. You hardly know where to begin: American-made or foreign; sedan, sports car, van or truck; new or used; cash, credit or lease? If these decisions aren’t enough, move on to options, color and insurance.

But, wait a second. Maybe these are the wrong questions. The first question to answer is really “why”. So, you stop long enough to put down the newspaper ads, turn over your budget worksheets and try to answer the “why” question.

After careful thought you conclude that the reason you are doing all of this is because you are afraid your old car will let you down and you will be late for work and lose your job. So, the real issue is getting to work on time. You begin to think of ways to answer the “why” question and you recall the new carpool set-up posted on the bulletin board at work. You call the carpool number and get a regular ride for a fraction of the price of a new car.

Asking the big “why” question is a good approach to every significant issue we face. But it is even more important when it comes to life itself! Why are you alive? It could not be a more important question.

Multitudes of people are frantically looking for fulfillment on the outside and are failing because there has never been any kind of definition of purpose on the inside. They give years of their lives to pursuing degrees that make no difference at all. Their achievements seem meaningless. They move in and out of marriages that never seem to bring satisfaction. They scrimp and save to buy

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houses they find boring after the first year. They float from religion to religion or church to church hoping to find outside answers without ever articulating the inside question: Why?

The mighty answer to this big “why” question is to find purpose in life. And let me tell you that the power of purpose is fantastic. When you have a life purpose your options are limited. You pick your college, select your mate, buy your house and choose your career on the basis of fulfilling your life purpose rather than on the basis of random selection. When you have a life purpose your direction is set. You know which way to head and make your choices and sacrifices in order to get yourself there. All of the outside actions are based on an inside purpose. When you have a life purpose your success can be measured. At the end of the day or at the end of a lifetime there is some tangible means of measurement. You can say, “I have succeeded because I knew where I was going and I got there!” Otherwise it is altogether possible to arrive at the end of life and still wonder if you went in the wrong direction.

No one better demonstrated the power of purpose than Jesus. In John 3:17 we are told that “*God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*” Here is Jesus’ purpose for his thirty-three years of earthly life. In Luke 19:10 we learn that “*the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*” There is no doubt about why he was here. Jesus said it himself in John 10:10: “*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*”

All of Jesus’ decisions and actions were determined by his purpose. He chose to come in Bethlehem rather than Baltimore, in the first century rather than the fifth century. He determined whom he would heal, where he would preach, what he would do, how he would die . . . all on the basis of his purpose. All of his life revolved around his stated purpose and at the end of his life he shouted from the cross, “*It is finished.*” He achieved the mission he had set out to do.

Jesus’ example was clearly followed by his disciples. When John wrote his gospel he thought of all that Jesus had done and said in John 20:30-31:

*Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are*

*not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

John knew what his life’s purpose was. That purpose helped John sort out from all Jesus said and did and enabled him to decide what to include and exclude in the Gospel of John.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans he explained his life’s purpose in Romans 15:20 saying, “*It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation.*” Paul’s purpose enabled him to decide which cities to visit and which cities to bypass in his missionary ministry. His personal life purpose was to preach the gospel where no one else had ever done it before.

Having a purpose statement is not something that is unique to the Bible or to Christianity. It is something that has been broadly adopted within our society. Major corporations spend hundreds of thousands of dollars with the brightest minds available in order to determine and state their corporate purpose. Colleges and universities undertake self-studies to review and revise the purpose of their institutions. Military leaders very carefully define the specific purpose of every weapon before it goes through the long and expensive processes of design and manufacture.

All of these recognize the power of purpose. When carefully determined and clearly stated it becomes the compass by which all other decisions are directed and it becomes the standard by which everything is evaluated.

And so it is for our lives. We must decide our purpose on the inside and then live it on the outside.

What is the purpose of your life? Why are you alive?

The Bible frequently emphasizes the importance of making a life purpose choice. You may remember that Joshua, the successor of Moses, laid a choice before the people of Israel. It is well stated in Joshua 24:15:

*“. . . choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land*

*you are now living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”*

Jesus often drew the line of choice. In Matthew 10:37 he said, “*Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*” Jesus was saying that if you are his disciple you have to make a choice between your relatives and your Redeemer. They cannot both be first.

Jesus also said in Matthew 6:24, “*No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money.*” There are lots of people who have chosen as their life purpose to make money. Jesus said that to make your life purpose Money—as an end in itself—is to choose against God.

No choice is itself a choice. To not choose family, money or God as a life purpose is to choose nothing. But nothing means that life’s purpose will be daily responding to the buffeting of circumstances. Many people have made this choice. They have chosen to “live a day at a time”, to have no guiding purpose, no ultimate goal, no answer to the “why” question for living. Their purpose is merely survival. The truth is that a deliberate choice must be made about a life purpose and that no choice is a choice!

What is God’s purpose for us? The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” While these are not specifically biblical words they are biblical truths.

Psalms 29:2 refers to inside-out living when it says, “*Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.*” 1 Corinthians 10:31 talks about the inside and the outside when it says, “*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*” Jesus said in John 10:10, “*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*” And James 1:17 says, “*Every good and perfect gift is from above.*” God intends for us to have abundant liv-

ing and everything that is any good at all is a present from him.

The word “glorify” in Greek comes from the word that originally meant “reputation”. To glorify God is to build up his reputation. What we are on the inside and what we do on the outside should make God look good. “Enjoy” means enjoy—to have the benefits of, to take advantage of, to appreciate, to be happy. Put them together and we have God’s purpose for our lives which is that we make him look good and that we are happy with all the good he gives us.

Let’s suppose that you agree with all that’s been said so far. You understand the power of purpose in your life. You agree that a choice must be made. You realize that God’s purpose for every one of us is to glorify him and enjoy him forever. Now we must decide what our purpose is for God.

Another way of saying this is: What do you want to do with your life?

If you were to sit down today and write out your life purpose, what would you write? I understand that this is not something that can be done in a few minutes nor is it an easy thing to do.

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I shared this purpose idea with a man about six weeks ago. He got back to me this past week and told me that just the process has had a huge effect on his life. He has thought through things he never faced before. He scratched out a purpose statement that he has revised and rewritten numerous times. It’s getting better and better. He’s already seeing the positive impact it’s having on all he does—from the inside-out!

My challenge to you who want to live right from the inside-out is to take the time to do the same thing. Pray about and then write down what your life is all about and what is your life’s purpose. Memorize it. Live by it. As God guides you, revise and update it. Determine your purpose from God. You will find in this a basis for making your decisions in good times and bad and you will find a standard by which you can measure the successes and failures of life.

In order to help you pick a purpose for your life I want to do something I have thought about for a long time. It is sharing something that is a very private part of me but I do so with the hope and the prayer that it will help and encourage you.

Some years ago I sat down to do exactly what I am recommending to you here, to write my own life purpose. I went through much the same process I am recommending to you now. It has become a gift of God for helping me live the inside-out life. I have repeatedly compared it to the decisions that I have faced over the years and have found a basis for making those decisions that I would otherwise not have had. By no means am I suggesting that you adopt my purpose. You must write your own. I give you mine only as an example: The purpose of Leith Anderson's life is: To please God; to enjoy God's gifts; and, to leave a godly heritage.

Sounds kind of short and simple, doesn't it? But it took a lot of prayer and work. It is the statement by which I map my life.

I have also added seven strategies for how I am to go about living this purpose. They are not accomplishments but they are the ways that I strive to do what I am supposed to do:

(1) To walk daily with Jesus Christ and thereby know his will and utilize his power to do his will.

(2) To live life fully every day, without regret about the past or worry about the future.

(3) To share lifelong marriage with Charleen that is mutually satisfying, fulfilling and happy.

(4) To raise our four children to live balanced, wholesome, godly lives and to maintain lifelong friendships with them.

(5) To faithfully and effectively serve the church of Jesus Christ leaving a strong, well-taught, on-going body of disciples.

(6) To be content with whatever God has for me, no matter what that might be.

(7) To walk in integrity, honesty and holiness no matter what the circumstances or price.

What in the world are you supposed to do with your life? Will you take the time and the discipline to write down your life purpose? As one sage has cleverly said, "If you aim at nothing you will hit it every time." Instead, set your purpose—set your aim—on God's perfect will for your life. Glorify God and enjoy him forever!

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