

Text: Ephesians 1:1-14

Title: "What on earth am I here for?"

Date: December 28, 2008

Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

The Alpha Course is a video-based introduction to the Christian faith that was created by a church in England. The teacher on the video is an Anglican minister by the name of Nicky Gumbel.

In the introductory video to the series, Gumbel tells the story of a young woman who was employed as a nanny by a British couple. This young woman was not English and although she had a passing grasp of the language, she sometimes missed the nuances of common English expressions.

For example, my brother-in-law's first language is French. Although his English is excellent, he sometimes misses English figures of speech. One day we were talking about how people tend to follow fads and trends so easily and he said, "Yeah, I hate it when people **jump on the band stand.**" What he meant was, "jump on the band **wagon.**"

Well, one day this young nanny in Nicky Gumbel's story was on the main floor of the house where she worked and she heard the children on the second floor making a terrible commotion. She came running up the stairs to see what was happening. She opened the door to the room from which the noise was coming and she said to the children: "**What are you doing on earth?!**"

Now, what she'd meant to say, of course, was "**what on earth are you doing?**" But the question she asked was much more important. I'm probably sure the children that room were totally unprepared to answer it – after all, they were pre-schoolers.

But at some point in our lives we need to answer it. At some point in our lives, we've probably all asked it in one way or another:

- "Why am I here?"
- "Does my life have any meaning?"
- "I want my life to count for something – what should I do?"

Or as Rick Warren phrases it in his book, The Purpose Driven Life, "**What on earth am I here for?**"

In 1996 Karen Cheng, a high school student in southern California, accomplished something that no one had ever done before – she achieved a perfect score of 1,600 on her Scholastic Achievement Test, her SAT, AND a perfect score of 8,000 on the tough University of California acceptance test. She was accepted for entrance to Harvard University and hopes to become a lawyer and eventually a judge.

Her teachers call her “Wonder Woman” because of her unquenchable thirst for knowledge and her ability to retain what she learns. She is gifted!

But the news story about her achievement included a brief but significant interchange with a reporter. When he asked her, “**What is the meaning of life?**” she replied, “**I have no idea. I would like to know myself.**”

In doing research for his book, Life on the Edge, Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family found that one of the major stress points for the emerging generation of young people in North America is the absence of meaning in life.

Karen Cheng, as unusually brilliant as she is, isn’t unusual among her generation. The late Dr. Francis Schaeffer, one of the most clear thinking Christian analysts of Western culture, said: “**The damnation of this generation is that it doesn’t know why it has meaning.**” (as quoted in Focus on the Family Newsletter, May 1996)

### **Why is knowing “why” important?**

In his book, The Purpose Driven Life, Rick Warren identifies several benefits of knowing the purpose for your life.

#### **First, knowing your purpose gives meaning to your life.**

Dr. Victor Frankl was a Jewish Austrian doctor who survived Hitler’s death camps during the Second World War. In the camp, Frankl watched strong men die and weak men survive. Why did some endure while others perished? After the war, he recorded his conclusions about his experience in a book entitled Man’s Search for Meaning. Those who died, Frankl observed, had become focused on their own immediate suffering, while those who survived had somehow kept a focus beyond themselves, either on the welfare of their fellow prisoners or on the hope of seeing their loved ones again some day. Based on his experience, Frankl concluded: “**a man can survive any `what’ if he has a `why.’**”

If we focus on the problems we’re currently facing in life, we may very well lose our grip on hope and life. But if we grip God’s promise that our future is better than our immediate circumstances, then we can carry on.

**“‘For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.’” Jeremiah 29:11**

#### **Second, knowing your purpose simplifies your life.**

We all face a host of competing possibilities in life. I get emails from many different Christian organizations inviting me to take action on this or that important issue. The issues they identify are all important but I can't respond to them all – neither can you.

Knowing our purpose in life helps us to make choices about what we are to do and what we aren't to do. Otherwise, we are driven by what one Christian author calls, the "tyranny of the urgent."

### **Third, knowing your purpose focuses your life.**

I've been called by God to be the senior pastor this church. I focus on preaching and worship. I have a general oversight for the life of the church. There are plenty of things that I do in fulfilling that ministry, but there are plenty of things associated with this church that I don't do.

I don't do the youth ministry here – Pastor Andy does that. I don't do the small group and seniors ministry here – Pastor Norm does that. I don't lead the Christian Education ministry – Pastor Paris does that. I don't clean the washrooms here – the Karys do that. I don't prepare the church bulletin for Sunday – Shelly Redekopp does that. I don't look after cleaning the snow off the parking lot – the Board of Management does that. I don't prepare the table for Communion services – the Deaconesses do that. I don't interview people for church membership – the Deacons do that.

I know something about all of these things, but they aren't my purpose in ministry. I focus on what I've been called to do and on what I do best.

### **Fourth, knowing your purpose motivates your life.**

Rick Warren wrote: "Purpose always produces passion. Nothing energizes like a clear purpose. On the other hand, passion dissipates when you lack a purpose. ... It is usually meaningless work, not overwork, that wears us down, saps our strength and robs our joy." (The Purpose Driven Life, p. 33)

My personal experience reflects Warren's observation. I can endure an immense amount of work and stress if I know the "why." It's when I work hard for no purpose that I begin to experience the negative consequences of stress. The emotional condition we call "burnout" isn't usually caused by hard work but by working hard without purpose.

### **Fifth, knowing your purpose prepares you for eternity.**

Warren refers to a familiar story from the life of James Dobson, founder of the *Focus on the Family* ministry. In college, Dobson was an excellent athlete and he made it his goal to become the school's tennis champion. He accomplished

the goal and was proud that his trophy was prominently displayed in the school's trophy cabinet.

Some years later, however, Dobson received the trophy in the mail. Apparently, someone had cleaned out the trophy cabinet and had thrown it in the garbage. Someone found it there and, recognizing Dobson's name, sent it to him.

It doesn't really matter what people think of what we've done with our lives and talents – one day, all their trophies and praise will gather dust and be forgotten. But one day, we will all stand before God to give a report on what we've done with our lives.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans: **“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.’ So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.” Romans 14:10-12**

### **Paul's purpose for living**

Paul touches on the purpose of life here in Romans 14:11 but in Ephesians 1 he makes it very explicit. Three times in his opening words to the church in Ephesus, he identified the purpose for living that motivated him, focused him and gave meaning to his life, and in turn, he identified the purpose for living that should motivate, focus and give meaning to our lives. Paul says that...

- First of all, God chose us and brought us into his family **“to the praise of the glory of His grace.” (Ephesians 1:6)**
- Second, God chose to give us a heavenly inheritance so that we who put our faith in Jesus would be **“to the praise of His glory.” (Ephesians 1:12)**
- Finally, God has given us the Holy Spirit as a seal to guarantee our final redemption as His possession **“to the praise of His glory.” (Ephesians 1:14)**

### **Jesus' purpose for living**

And how do we bring God glory? Let's let Jesus set the standard. Jesus said to the Father in John 17: **“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.” (John 17:4)**

What was the purpose for Paul's life? God's glory.  
 What was Jesus' purpose for living? God's glory.  
 What is to be the purpose for our lives? God's glory.

### **How do we bring God glory?**

When we fulfill God's purpose for us, we bring Him glory. There are **five main tasks** for which God created us. As a church, we have committed ourselves to these **five priorities**:

- Priority #1 -- Inspiring worship**
- Priority #2 -- Systematic teaching**
- Priority #3 -- Caring fellowship**
- Priority #4 -- Need-oriented service**
- Priority #5 -- Worldwide evangelism**

The purpose of the church isn't lived out only when we're all together in one place on Sunday morning. The purpose of the church is lived out Sunday through Saturday as you, God's people, fulfill His purpose for you in your homes, your workplaces, your schools, your sports teams and community groups – in fact, every where we go and everything we do is to be an expression of God's purpose for our lives.

Rick Warren uses slightly different language and I like the way he takes the purposes of the church of Jesus Christ and personalizes them as the five priorities for the followers of Jesus Christ.

As we come to the end of 2008 and begin 2009, I'd like to remind us the priorities we have as a church and ask ourselves, "are we on track with God's purposes?" Are we on track with God's purposes for us as a church? Are we on track with God's purposes for us as individual believers? How can we bring glory to God as individuals and together as a church?

### **First, we bring glory to God by worshipping Him**

**"You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.... you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." 1 Peter 2:5, 9**

Worship is the highest purpose of God for His church and for His people.

Jesus said that God is combing the earth, looking for worshippers who will declare His praise.

**"Yet a time is coming and has now come," Jesus said, "when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." (John 4:23-24)**

Those true worshipers, one by one, are being built, like “living stones” into a “spiritual house” that will offer God worship.

We are the body of Christ. We are being built, stone by stone, Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:19-22, “to become a holy temple in the Lord ... built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.”

And what purpose does a temple serve? One purpose alone -- **Worship!**

Worship is more than just a one-hour service on Sunday or the kinds of songs we sing. Biblical worship is what we give to God “24-7” as His people. We looked at this truth a few weeks ago when we studied Paul’s teaching that we are to present our lives as “living sacrifices” as our act of “spiritual worship” to God. (Romans 12:1-2) When God’s people join together for worship we are gathering to express praise to God and to receive grace from God. We go from corporate worship on Sunday both empowered and directed to worship God as families and as individuals in the day-to-day expression of our love for Him in our workplaces, our schools and our communities.

When we obey God by...

- ❑ Loving our families
- ❑ Respecting our employers
- ❑ Doing good things for our neighbors
- ❑ Obeying the laws of the land.

**God is glorified.**

**Second, we bring glory to God by loving other believers**

**"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35**

Our mission statement calls this expression of love, “**caring fellowship.**”

When we were living in Toronto Ruth & I invited a neighbour who was a single parent to our church’s adult Christmas banquet. As we talked at our table, one of the women from the church commented on how important to her the support of the church had been in her struggle as a single parent. Our friend leaned over to Ruth and me and quietly asked, “What is fellowship?”

It’s a word that translates the Greek word, “Koinonia” which means sharing or participation. It means having a part in each other’s life – carrying the load together.

Songwriter Bill Winters captured the spirit of “fellowship” in his song, “Lean On Me”:

“Lean on me, when you’re not strong  
 And I’ll be your friend, I’ll help you carry on,  
 For it won’t be long  
 ‘Till I’m gonna need somebody to lean on.”

Immediately after God’s Spirit founded the church in Jerusalem, we read these words in the book of Acts: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42) They sold possessions so that they could help those in need -- they cared for each other.

Loving and caring for other members of God’s family is a natural part of being a follower of Jesus Christ. And as we love one another as God has loved us, **God is glorified.**

**Third, we bring glory to God by becoming like Christ.**

**“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12:2**

Our mission statement commits us to the priority of “systematic teaching.” We amplify that statement with these words:

**“As disciples of Jesus Christ we commit ourselves to continual growth in our love for, our understanding of and our obedience to the Word of God.”**

The goal of our teaching of the Bible isn’t just the conveying of information about God – the goal of our teaching of God’s Word is the transformation of lives by God’s Spirit through obedience to God’s Word. God’s Word transforms our minds. But it isn’t only our minds that need changing – our behavior needs to reflect what’s happening in our minds.

Jesus said that being one of his followers involved being taught **“to obey everything I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:20**

And as we our minds are transformed by God’s Word, and as we obey what we are learning from God’s Word, **“we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18**

In 1980, Charles Colson first visited Angola Prison to conduct Easter meetings. Angola is a prison with over 5,000 inmates, 70% of whom are serving life sentences with no parole. When Colson first saw the place, he was reminded of Dante’s phrase describing hell: “Abandon hope, all ye who enter through these gates.” The place was so bad in 1980 that Johnny Cash, who was with

him, wasn't allowed to walk through the cellblocks because it was too dangerous.

But 22 years later, Colson returned to celebrate Easter at Angola Prison and found it a very different place. The men were hopeful, even happy. The prison was safer and cleaner. There were signs of the church everywhere – mature Christian inmates, lots of Bible studies. The prison is headed by a Christian warden who has done many things to help men change. For example, many of the guards are Christians. Colson asked one officer why he had come to Angola, “My pastor sent me,” he replied. Churches in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, had taken on the prison as a mission field. When Colson gave the invitation at the end of his Easter message for men to stand to declare their allegiance to Jesus Christ, hundreds of inmates stood to their feet. (Breakpoint, Commentary #020506)

Even though they were prisoners, these men had been transformed by the renewing power of God's Word and God's Spirit. And even the environment they lived in reflected the change.

God's Word and God's Spirit can change people and places to become more like Jesus Christ. And **God is glorified**.

#### **Fourth, we bring glory to God by serving others with our gifts**

**“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” 1 Peter 4:10-11**

Even in our world, one of the most obvious ways in which Christians bring glory to God is through deeds of love and kindness done for those in need.

Bruce Thielemann, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, told of a conversation with a member of his flock who said, “You preachers talk a lot about ‘do unto others,’ but when you get right down to it, it comes down to basin theology.”

Thielemann asked, “Basin theology? What's that?”

The layman said, “Remember what Pilate did when he had the chance to acquit Jesus? He called for a basin and washed his hands of the whole thing. But Jesus, the night before His death, called for a basin and proceeded to wash the feet of the disciples. It all comes down to basin theology: Which one will you use?” (From Charles R. Swindoll, The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart, p. 516)

The shape of your basin is going to be according to the gifts & skills that God has given you to use:

- ❑ Gifts of counsel for people needing direction in life;
- ❑ Gifts of teaching for people needing spiritual nurture;
- ❑ Gifts of service for people who have tangible needs;
- ❑ Gifts of giving for people who are needing financial support.

But whatever the shape of your basin, when you serve with the same attitude & spirit as that of Jesus, **God will be glorified.**

#### **Fifth, we bring glory to God by telling others about Him**

**“The grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.” 2 Corinthians 4:15**

During the preparations for one of Luis Palau’s evangelistic crusades in Latin America, a very poor, unshaven man came to one of their week-long Biblical counseling courses. It was unusual to see a man of this condition attending an in-depth training session. Most often, those with a better education and social standing are the ones who take an active role in this type of intensive preparation. The illiterate man attended every class but those in leadership didn’t expect him to do much counseling.

Several weeks later, during the crusade, all of the available counselors were busy when a doctor walked in. This illiterate man immediately greeted the doctor and took him into a room for counseling. Once the director of counseling discovered what had happened, he became deeply concerned. When the doctor came out, the director asked if he needed help. The physician replied, “No, thank you. This fellow has helped me very much.” The next day that same doctor showed up with two other colleagues and asked to see the shoeless man.

By the end of the week, that illiterate man had led four doctors and their wives to Christ.

Evangelism, one person said, is nothing more than one beggar telling another beggar where he can find bread. When we simply share with others what Jesus has done for us, **God is glorified.**

Mel Gibson’s movie, “The Passion of the Christ” is a very powerful and graphic interpretation of the events leading up to the crucifixion of Christ. The movie begins with Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, wrestling with His decision to obey the Father’s will and go to the cross.

**“Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? `Father, save me from this hour'?” John 12:27**

In the shadows, a figure representing Satan is trying to tempt Jesus to reject the Father's will. Jesus appears physically vulnerable as he bears the emotional strain of the anticipation of his death. As the tension peaks, a snake slithers out from under this demonic figure's robe and slides toward Jesus.

The camera focuses on the snake, moving relentlessly toward the vulnerable Jesus. Then – SLAM! Down comes Jesus foot to crush the serpent's head!

**“No,”** Jesus said, **“it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”** John 12:28

Jesus is resolved! He will fulfill God's purpose for His life! He will bring the Father glory!

Over my desk I have the words of the American theologian, Jonathan Edwards.

**“Resolved: that all men should live for the glory of God.  
Resolved second: that whether others do or not, I will.”**

Will you?

- **Invitation to Prayer Ministry...**

***PRAYER MINISTRY***

If you've come this morning and you find that there's something weighing upon your heart – a situation you're facing or a burden you're bearing – and you want someone to pray with you, I want to invite you to come for prayer while we sing our final song.

- Just come and sit to my left or here in the centre and someone from our prayer ministry team will meet with you
- The prayer team will be available here for about 15 minutes following the end of the service.

Don't take that burden home – there are people who want to help you bring it to the Lord.

- **Final Song:** Here I Am to Worship
- **Benediction**