

Why Am I Here?

Luke 4:1–2a; 4:5–8

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, **2** where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. **6** And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. **7** If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” **8** Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’ ”

Introduction. If each of us lives long enough will someday find ourselves in a particular place, probably in a given room in our house and ask, “Why am I here?” We know we made the trip but have little idea why we made it. (Unfortunately, I find I am asking that question more and more.)

Hopefully long before each of us are at that life stage, **we are asking that same question in a much larger context – “Why am I here?”** We wonder about our purpose here on earth. The answer to that question will and should have a profound impact on how we live our lives and the attitudes we hold.

This morning I want to invite you to join me in pondering this all important question. Really this question is a two part question. The **first part is about all of us – “Why are any of us here?”** Why do we exist?

Why are we here?

One of the most intriguing books in the Bible is Ecclesiastes. If you read it closely, it will make you think about this question. Some of the answers it provides may startle you. The first answer is found in the opening, “**Vanity of vanities. All is vanity.**” That sure is a dark perspective.

One answer to our question is **there is “no purpose” to our life.** We just merely exist and nothing makes sense. Unfortunately, this is a conclusion which is tempting for many to adopt, especially when life throws them a huge curve, suffering comes their way or things do not turn out as they had hoped.

Perhaps a higher rung on the ladder of why we exist flows largely from an evolutionary perspective – **survival of the fittest. Our purpose is to “survive,” to make it from one day to the next.** So we work hard to stay alive and raise our children so the next generation can come into existence and we can have grandchildren. (Probably the main reason we allow our children to live is so we can have grandchildren.) If you hold to this perspective and ask someone how they are doing and they say, “Surviving,” it is cause to rejoice because he is fulfilling his purpose.

In Ecclesiastes we find another answer that is a little higher rung on the ladder. The wise king claimed there was nothing better than to **“eat, drink and be merry.”** The contemporary version of this is the **purpose of life is to be “happy.”** (That very idea is encoded in our national psyche in the Declaration of Independence – inalienable right – “pursuit of happiness.”

Parents who buy into this think **their chief purpose as parents are to make their children happy.** It seems to me a lot of folks hold to this and invest a great deal of time, energy and resource in the quest to be happy.

Perhaps the other side of the happiness coin is thinking our main purpose is **to avoid pain and suffering.** Sometimes this purpose arises from a religious or philosophical perspective such as Buddhism. If we escape this existence with the minimal amount of discomfort, then we have been successful. But one does not have to hold to Eastern philosophy to be influenced by this view. Many tend to live this when it comes life experience – if the job is painful change jobs, if the relationship is painful then end it, if there is some drug that will cloak the pain take it.

Another related answer to this question is one that has spiritual connotations. **The real goal of this life on earth is to make it through so we can get to the next.** We are here because it gives us the possibility to make it to the next. Those who hold to this view often do not consider what happens here to be that important for the now but only in how it impacts the next life. “I am just trying to get through this life.”

A biblical perspective

There is another perspective seems to be in alignment with what is promoted as our purpose in scripture.

Just after Jesus' baptism, he had a unique experience. The Holy Spirit led him into a remote area where he spent an extended time in prayer. While there, the Devil came along and tempted him.

In one of the temptations, the tempter showed Jesus the splendor of all the world's kingdoms. Then he made an offer, "*I will give you control over all these if you worship me.*" Jesus' response was intriguing because he revealed our purpose:

It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'

Jesus believed **his/our purpose was connected to our Creator**. We were created to worship and serve God.

Through the history of the church, **the question of our purpose has been prominent**. One of the most famous responses to why we exist was offered in the mid-1600's as clergy gathered in Scotland to form a confession. As a result of their efforts, The Shorter Westminster Confession was developed and adopted. It was a catechesis – a popular method of teaching matters of faith using questions and answers. The first question drilled deep: "**What is the chief end of man?**" This is their language for our question of why are we here. In their attempt to distill the biblical witness, they wrote the answer: "**Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.**"

If you believe God made us, it is easy to understand **we were created for God's pleasure**. From God's perspective we were made to be the object of His love. God bestowed his love on humanity.

So **our purpose is integrated into responding to God's great love for us**. We are designed to glorify God through worship and service. God made us to worship Him.

God is intrinsically worthy of worship and praise. God is the Creator of all there is and God cares for and acts to redeem His Creation. Such a one is worthy of adoration and affection.

C. S. Lewis proposed as human's **we naturally show praise for that which brings us pleasure**. Our praise flows from our nature. If you see a great work of art, you admire it and offer words of acclamation. When we hear a great piece of music that fills our senses, we allow our minds to wonder in its melody and applaud it in our hearts. We see a spectacular play in the game we rise to our feet in applause. When you four-year old child or grandchild gives you a personal hand-drawn card, you lavish praise on her.

We were designed to offer God worship. But how do we glorify God?

Unfortunately, **I fear we tend to have a very narrow view of what it means to worship and serve God**. For us church going folks, we tend to think worship is what happens on Sunday morning at 11:00 am when we gather. We even narrow that down to music set and some acts of worship. Yes, that is part of worship but worship is much more.

We tend to think **serving God is what we do when we volunteer at church for some kind of ministry**. We help with Family Promise. We serve as an usher. We teach a Sunday School class. Yes, these are all ways of serving God but serving is much broader.

We were designed to **worship and serve God through all dimensions of our lives**. Through our relationships – how we relate to and care for one another – we worship and serve God. Our random acts of kindness for a friend or a stranger bring glory to God. Through our vocation – whether serving as a pastor, a mason, a teacher, working on an assembly line – is a means to serve God. Paul exhorted his readers that **whatever they did, do with all their might to glorify God**. How invest our time and money are means for us to glorify God.

I believe when we are doing this most fully in our normal everyday life, we are most fulfilled. We will experience unbelievable joy. We will truly enjoy God.

Imagine a child who knows his parents love him is on the ball field and makes an unbelievable play. When the play is over, the child looks to the stands where his parents are

seated. When sees his Dad's pride in the play and Dad gives him the "at-a-boy," his heart is flooded with joy.

My purpose.

The second part of the question of purpose is very personal – "Why **am I** here?" What is my purpose? How do I live out this life of glorifying God?

For most of us this is the bigger question.

Have you ever watched a large orchestra perform? The purpose of the whole group is to produce the music and give pleasure to the audience. **The full sound of the music is the product of each instrument with their various contributions.** There are many different types of instruments being played. Even in a section of the orchestra, the instruments are varied and often play different parts to create the symphony.

What instrument has God created you to be? What part has God given me to play? Why am I here?

The answer to this fundamental question is a lifelong quest of discovery. It becomes clearer as we move toward what we know. There is no doubt that as Jeremiah said that God has a plan for you. **Paul tells us we are created in Christ Jesus for good works. Solomon reminds us God directs our steps.** God has a particular plan for each of us.

I have lived long enough that I can now reflect on several decades of vocational purpose for me. I was blessed at an early age to hear a distinct call to pastoral ministry. By God's grace, I responded and launched into ministry. Through the years as a pastor, I have sensed God's desire for me to love people and lead the churches I had the blessing to serve.

Early on I ministry, **I would imitate some of my minister "heroes"** in terms of preaching and approach. But throughout that time, I have come to realize **God has created me to be Dwight.** I have been given certain gifts, talents and passions. God has opened the door and planted in places where He wanted me to serve. Through the years, I have found as I moved toward what I sensed God was opening to me, I was moving toward my purpose.

A few years ago I had a traumatic experience as a pastor which made me wonder if I wanted to continue serving as a pastor. So I put out some search antennae. I applied for the director of a non-profit I admired. I also pursued the possibility of a consulting position. I was given the opportunity to take either of those positions. As I prayed and thought about my decisions, I prayed and thought a lot about things. In my heart, I realized God had purposed me to be a pastor. I am here today so you can probably see what my decision was.

Discovering why you are here is a process and lifelong journey. I pray you seek the Lord and discover how you can glorify and enjoy God most.