

Why Am I Here?

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 0 0] Well, as Adam said, tonight we come to our second talk in the series about who we are as people on this planet. And tonight's topic is, why am I here?

Not here in this room, of course. Why am I here in life? What's our purpose or reason for life? And let me just start off by saying that we ought to have an answer for this question.

I mean, if I asked you to meet me in Ligon Street this Friday night, you'd want to know why, wouldn't you? Is it to have dinner? Am I going to pay?

In that case, yes. We want to know why in the little decisions of life. And if that's the case, how much more so should we know why for all of life?

I mean, if we don't have a reason for living, then what's the point? Now, as we heard, people give all sorts of answers to that question of why we're here. We've heard some less than average questions tonight already, answers.

[1 : 0 4] But for others, we're here to make money. For others, it's simply to find pleasure or enjoyment in life. For others, we're here to be good. So how do we know what our purpose in life is?

Well, one guy called Steve Pavlina suggests this. He's got a website. He's a self-help guru. And on his website, he has an article entitled, How to Discover Your Life Purpose in 20 Minutes.

Three easy steps. It's on the first slide. See, first step. Take out a blank sheet of paper or open up a word processor where you can type.

Number two, write at the top, what is my true purpose in life? Number three, write an answer, any answer that pops into your head and repeat step three until you write the answer that makes you cry.

That is your purpose. I tried this. And for after 20 minutes, I didn't cry, although almost from boredom.

[2 : 1 0] And so I thought, what might make me cry? Let's think about that. And you know the first word that came to my mind? Onions. When I cut them, I cry.

So is that my purpose in the rest of my life, to cut onions? Well, perhaps, according to Steve. Now, I suppose this is one way you could do it, but I want to suggest to you tonight another way of finding our reason or purpose in life.

And that's to look at what God says in his word, the Bible. Now, you might disagree with what we're going to look at at the moment, but at least have a look to start with.

And I wanted you to start looking actually on page two of your booklets. So come with me to page two of your booklet. Starting at the very top, at sentence number 26.

Then God said, Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, and let, it should say, them rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over the creatures that move along the ground.

[3 : 2 6] So, God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them.

You see, here we are designed, we're told, in the image of God. We are made in his likeness, to reflect his character, if you like, and to rule over the earth.

But notice we are also designed as male and female, which implies relationship. And so, if this is our design, then this is how we're to live.

That's our purpose. To reflect God's character or likeness, and to rule over the earth in relationship with one another. Which is exactly what we see God telling us to do in the next sentence.

So, verse 28, God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, and over every living creature that moves along the ground.

[4 : 27] You see, this is our purpose in life. But notice we are to do this under God. You see here, God is the creator who creates us, and makes us, designs us.

We are to rule the world under him. And so, on the next slide, we see this clearly in Genesis chapter 2. So, just having a look at the screen, it says, Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden, and there he put the man he had formed.

And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. So, it's an enjoyable place. And in the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A little later it says, on the next slide, The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it. There it is, our purpose to rule over the earth. And the Lord God commanded man, You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die.

You see, Adam is put in this rich garden, not only to rule it, but to enjoy it. And it says there that he is to do so with God's word in his mind.

[5 : 42] In other words, he is to rule the world under God. He is to do so in a right relationship with God, where he obeys God's word and serves God in this task.

So, here we see our purpose. It kind of has a number of steps to it. So, again, on the next slide, our purpose in life is to reflect God's character, God's image, likeness, while ruling and enjoying the world in relationship with one another and in relationship and obedience to him.

That's why we are here. And when you think about it, it rings true with our own experience. Take reflecting God's character, for example. God is a God of love and justice, forgiveness and faithfulness.

And these are the qualities we all know are good, don't we? These are the qualities we want people to reflect, at least to us, don't we? I've been teaching the Bible in schools for a number of years now, and I've had teachers say to me that they love the morals that we teach.

What they really mean is God's character. They say, the kids are so much better behaved when they are loving and forgiving one another. Well, when they are.

[6 : 58] Of course, they don't always do that. But you see, the very fact that things work better when they do reflect God's character tells us that we have been designed this way, you see.

In fact, these are the qualities we long for, don't we? We cry out for justice when there is injustice. We cry out for faithfulness when there is unfaithfulness.

We cry out for love when there is hate. We long for these qualities. And the very fact that we long for these qualities suggests that we've been designed to live this way, to reflect them.

This is part of our purpose in life. Or take ruling over the world. We naturally act as though we're at the top of the food chain, don't we? I mean, have you ever thought that an ant might have authority over you?

Of course not. It's never entered your mind. And if there is an animal out there, like a shark, perhaps, who tries to exert his authority over us, what do we do? We kill him.

[8 : 04] Because we rule over them. We know we rule over the world, don't we? Our experience rings true with what the Bible is telling us, you see. Or take relationships.

Aren't we much happier when we have relationships? Whether it's friendships or significant others. I mean, why do we all crave friendships of some kind? And why are we most happy when we are getting on with our friends and we feel uncomfortable when we're fighting with our friends?

Why is that? Well, the Bible says it's because of the way we've been made, our design. We're designed and created for relationships of one kind or another. You see, our very experience rings true with what the Bible teaches us about our purpose in life.

Even our purpose to serve and obey God or worship him can be seen by the way people act. Many people act. Because many people try and worship some sort of God. I mean, why is it we have so many religions in the world?

Why is it that people seek to worship something or other, as Jimmy said last week? Could it be because we have been designed to worship God? It could it be because we have this inbuilt craving for relationship with God?

[9 : 17] Could it be that deep down we know there is someone bigger than us? See, when you look at the people around the world, many seem to have this God-sized hole, if you like.

And they are trying to fill it with something or other, whether it's another God of religion or a God of society like money and career. But we have this God-sized hole. Why? Because that's how we've been made.

We've been made to live in relationship with God where we serve and obey him, ruling the world and enjoying it in relationship with one another. But there's a problem with this purpose and that problem is sin.

Sin, of course, is where we ignore God and turn our backs on him and sin is a problem because it creates conflict and leads to judgment. You see, when people are sinful, they are selfish, greedy and it leads to all sorts of conflict.

Our children were watching TV last night. They're watching a Cinderella story with Hilary Duff, I think. Anyway, they're watching this Cinderella story and my son said, takes after me, this romantic stuff is boring.

[10 : 24] I want to watch something else. And our daughter then replied, no, I want to watch this. The kissing party is coming up. I'm worried about her. But instead of reflecting God's character of love and generosity towards others, their sinful selfishness kicked in and it created tension and that led to conflict.

They fought and let me tell you that then led to judgment. But it's the same with us. Our sin has corrupted our image and we are no longer reflecting God's character as we were created to do.

Instead, we are selfish and greedy and it leads to all sorts of conflict and we no longer rule the world as we ought. Instead, there is war and environmental abuse and so on.

We no longer have good relationships with everyone. Instead, there are people who annoy us or who we don't get on very well with. And we are no longer in right relationship with God.

Instead, we are separated from Him and we can't get back. You see, sin has frustrated our purpose, our meaning in life. It's no wonder people are not fulfilled in life.

[11 : 36] It's no wonder, you've got a few years yet, but it's no wonder a few years on people have midlife crises. I saw a photo of the other day of a wrestler with a midlife crisis. Here he is.

I'm really not sure how a pink bike will help him feel fulfilled, but the caption, I didn't get the caption, but the caption was, a wrestler, midlife crisis.

You see, sin has frustrated our lives, our purpose, and therefore our fulfillment. It even has impacted our world so that there are so-called natural disasters. And ultimately, sin leads to judgment, as I said.

And the Bible calls that judgment hell. So we need a solution to this problem of sin so that we can live the way we were designed to live and find true fulfillment. Now, of course, you may not believe that this is our purpose, what I've just outlined for us.

You might not believe that we're designed to reflect God's character and rule over the world in relationship with one another and with him. In fact, you might not even believe there is a God or that there is life after death.

[12 : 41] You might have your own purpose or reason for living. But let me tell you that whatever reason or purpose you have, death makes it meaningless.

Death makes it meaningless. Death is the great problem for every reason or meaning in life. This is where I want us to turn to page three in your booklets, to that first reading we saw.

As we heard, the writer is the king of Israel and he's at the height of his career. He's amassed gold, silver achievements and so on.

But look at what he says in verse number two, sentence number two. Meaningless, meaningless, says the teacher. Utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless. What do people gain from all their labours at which they toil under the sun?

Generations come, generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets and hurries back to where it rises. And so he goes and skip down to, well, across the page, the top first number 11 and he says no one remembers the former generations.

[13 : 49] They're just gone and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them. See what he's saying? Everything is meaningless. Why? Well, because nothing lasts.

What do we gain from our work? He says in verse number three, his answer is nothing because there's no lasting impact. Instead, the earth continues as normal.

The sun rises, the sun sets, generations come, generations go. So what's the point of life? That's what he's asking. Why are we here when what we do does not seem to make any lasting difference?

And so he tries to find meaning and fulfillment in pleasure. Turn over the page to page four at the top there. He's talking to himself and he says, come now, I will test myself, you, with pleasure to find out what is good.

But that also proved to be meaningless. Laughter, I said, is madness and what does pleasure accomplish? I tried cheering myself with wine and embracing folly.

[14 : 55] My mind, though, is still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under heavens during the few days of their life. Do you see what he's saying here?

He tried to find meaning and fulfillment with the things of life and so he tries getting drunk, drinking wine. Sounds like a lot of Australians, doesn't it? And then he tried finding fulfillment in work.

So sentence number four, I undertook great projects. I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and so on and so on. And yet that does not bring him meaning and fulfillment either.

And so he tries something else. He tries accumulating lots of possessions. So verse number seven, he says, I bought male and female slaves. I had other slaves who were born in my house.

I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers and a harem as well, the delights of a man's heart.

[16:02] You see, he's accumulated all this stuff. You know, if there were MacBook Airs and Samsung Galaxies or whatever, he would have had it all. He even has a heron, a bunch of women that he has slept with to find fulfillment.

It all sounds very much like our society, doesn't it? Accumulating wealth, going from relationship to relationship. And then in sentence number ten, he summarizes by saying he has denied no pleasure to himself.

And while he was taking part in it, there was some reward in the actual activity, but in the end, did it give him true meaning? And purpose in life? Did he find fulfillment and happiness?

Verse number eleven, when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had tried to achieve, everything was meaningless. A chasing after the wind, nothing was gained under the sun.

It didn't work, you see. None of it gave him meaning. His wisdom stayed with him throughout this whole exercise and it told him that all these things were meaningless. Why?

[17:06] Because he knows none of it lasts. Instead, death takes it all. In fact, even being wise is meaningless because death will take the wise person and the fool.

Have a look at verse number 15, last paragraph there on your page. He said to myself, the fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?

I said to myself, this too is meaningless, for the wise like the fool will not be long remembered. The days have already come when both have been forgotten. Like the fool, the wise too must die.

That's pretty depressing stuff, isn't it? But death is the greatest problem, you see. It makes everything meaningless. Sure you can work hard in life, but then you're dying, what becomes of all your hard work?

Maybe you can leave it for your children, but how do you know they will use it wisely? My great, great, couple great grandparents were rich, millionaire rich, right?

[18:07] Left it to their first children, they gambled it all away and left me nothing. Yes, I'm still annoyed about it. But you see, death means there are no guarantees in life, and so it makes everything meaningless.

If I'm going to die, then it doesn't matter how rich we are or how poor, how loving we are or how unloving we are, how hard we've worked or how lazy we've been.

It might make a bit of difference to the quality of life now, but in the big picture, it is meaningless. We are here today, gone tomorrow, death takes it all.

I heard someone put it like this once, do you remember the ship called the Titanic? I think I had a slide, you know, the big ship that sunk, I'm assuming you remember it. Imagine you're on the Titanic and it's going down.

We're all going to die, and if we're all going to die, does it matter if you go down hugging someone or mugging someone for their money? does it really matter?

[19:14] What difference does it make? If we're about to die in five minutes and a guy comes up to you and says, give me your wallet, it doesn't matter. Do you say, oh no, there goes all my money? No, you say, well, we're going to both die in a moment.

Sure, here's my wallet and stab me as well. Who cares? It makes no difference. Death makes it all meaningless, you see. We're all about to die, not today, not tomorrow, I hope, but sooner than you think.

And if we're all about to die, then it doesn't matter how we live, whether it's hugging or mugging. We might be able to find little bits of meaning here and there as we help a person or use our gifts for good, but death will take even those deeds.

So life as a whole becomes meaningless either way. No matter how much we try to find meaning in the day-to-day things, ultimately, death makes it meaningless. Now you might be saying, okay, sure, alright, life is meaningless, so what?

It doesn't matter, but that's not what our experience tells us. It does matter. For two reasons. First, if life is meaningless, then it doesn't matter how we live.

[20 : 22] There's no right and wrong. People can steal or rape or kill, it doesn't matter. Death takes the rapist just like the good person. Who cares?

But we care, don't we? We care. We mentally cannot live in a world where there is no meaning, where there is no right and wrong. Our experience in life tells us there must be some sort of meaning, there must be right and wrong.

And second, we actually crave this meaning, we crave this purpose, we long for there to be meaning in this life, our very nature, the way we are built cries out for it.

I remember speaking with a man who was struggling with life, he wasn't sure what his purpose in life was and he even talked about taking his own life and everyone would be better off for it.

And at that point, do I tell him, well, life is meaningless because death takes it all anyway, so it doesn't matter. Do you think that would have helped him? Of course not.

[21 : 27] What's more, we crave hope for life beyond death as well as meaning. I've conducted a number of funerals at this church in fact, with people who don't believe in God, yet they still say to me, so good that we know our loved ones are in heaven.

They don't believe in God, they don't really believe in heaven and hell any other day of the week, but when death comes, they're so glad their loved ones are in heaven. It's illogical, isn't it?

But you see, their very being can't cope, it longs for meaning in this life, it longs for hope in the next, for life after death. Our very nature, how we are built, craves meaning, purpose, hope and fulfilment.

And so the question comes in, how can we defeat death and find meaning? How can we get past sin and find relationship again? And in the end, there's only one solution to these problems, and it's Jesus.

Jesus deals with our sin and with death. Jesus, you see, died on the cross and there he took the punishment our sins deserve. He paid the price for us ignoring God so that we can be free to come back to God in right relationship as we were designed to be.

[22 : 46] On the slide, there's a verse from the Bible that says, Christ died for sins once for all. He the righteous one, for us the unrighteous. Why?

To bring you to God. He deals with our sins so we can come back to God in relationship with him and find meaning in life. He bridges the gap that our sin created.

And by believing in Jesus we come back to God in right relationship and we find not only true purpose and meaning but we also find that we are renewed bit by bit into the likeness of God again, into the likeness of Christ as we were designed to reflect.

By believing in Jesus we learn again how to relate to one another and we learn again how to rule his world under him. You see through Jesus our creative purpose and meaning is restored if you like.

In fact Jesus does more than this because he not only died but he also rose again. He defeated death and opened a way for us to defeat it too. Suddenly life is no longer meaningless.

[23 : 53] Death does not have the last say. On the slide is another verse and it comes just after talking about Jesus resurrection that gives us victory and the writer says but thanks be to God he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore my dear brothers and sisters stand firm let nothing move you always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. It's not meaningless.

Jesus has conquered death and makes our meaningless lives meaningful again. Death no longer has the last say and so by believing in Jesus who rose to life after death we too can be certain of rising to life after death as well.

And that gives meaning to our work here and now. It gives meaning particularly to the Lord's work. It's not in vain. It's not meaningless and it gives us hope of life after death. Now this does not mean life will always be easy far from it.

But it works so much better and makes so much more sense by trusting in Jesus because we are living according to our design.

[25 : 05] I've got something to show you. Stay with me. Here is a shovel, right?

It's designed to dig holes. Okay? But I suppose you could use it as a bat. Let's give it a go. Bit awkward. You could also use it as a knife to cut fruit like a banana.

It's got dirt on it now. But it works so much better when it's used as it's designed to be used. It's the same with us. Life works so much better when we live out who we're designed to be.

God's image bearers reflect God's character and rule this world in relationship with one another and in relationship with him. Let me finish on page five.

Turn to page five in your booklets. Here Jesus is speaking about false teachers who give false meaning in life.

[26 : 13] But he says this. He says, Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep, the people. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, that's the false teachers, but the sheep have not listened to them.

I am the gate, who enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. See, by his death and resurrection, Jesus is the one who brings life and life to the full.

One with meaning now and hope for eternity. Jesus is the gate through whom we are saved. He is the one in whom we find green pasture or fulfillment in this life, as well as a certain hope for the next.

And so, can I ask you, do you have life and life to the full? Do you have meaning and purpose that resonates with your experience?

[27 : 15] Do you know fulfillment and hope? It's only in Jesus we can find and have these things. So, why don't you believe in Jesus?

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that in Jesus we can be restored to our relationship with you and one another and fulfill our design from the beginning.

And we thank you also that in Jesus the problem of death is dealt with so that our lives are no longer meaningless but meaningful. Father, help us to turn from whatever purpose in life we're chasing after and turn instead to Jesus.

It's in his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.