

## Primary Objective

### Matthew 4:18-22

This morning I want to introduce a new sermon series for May and the first part of June. And to do that I want to begin with the question: “What is the purpose of life?” What is the purpose of your life? Why are you here? This is one of the basic human questions everyone needs to answer in order to have a framework by which we make decisions and live our lives.

I asked Google what the purpose of life is, and the first hit was an article from a self-help website entitled: “[What’s the Purpose of Life? 16 Possible Answers from 16 Inspirational People.](#)” These are just random people the author considered to be inspirational and who seemed to know what their purpose is, and here are the answers they gave:

- The Dalai Lama: “I believe that the very purpose of life is to be happy.”
- Steve Pavlina: “The purpose of life is to explore and experience.”
- Byron Katie: “To understand that what is, really isn’t.”
- Chris Guillebeau: “Hmm... boots and cats?”
- Christie Marie Sheldon: “The only Soul-Filled purpose of life is to love and let what makes you soulfully happy guide you — it’ll all work out if that’s your guiding force.”
- Matthew Silver: “God gave you free will. That’s for you to decide. But I’d use your heart to find it.”
- Ralph Smart: “I believe it is to become our greatest version.”
- Parker Heuser: “The purpose of life is to discover your surroundings, discover yourself, follow your heart and evolve spiritually.”
- Barrie Davenport: “The purpose of life is to live mindfully and passionately in the present moment, to love unabashedly, to be a lifelong learner, to seek adventure and growth, and to spread kindness and peace along the way.”
- Gary Vaynerchuk: “To leave Legacy that is a North Star for all my family in the future.”
- Justine Musk: “To cultivate your gifts and inner knowing in your lifelong quest for soul: that point in place and time where what you do is who you are and whom you serve, and to take care of yourself is to take care of the world.”

- Alex Blackwell: “To give love without being asked and to believe you are worthy to receive love always.”
- Will Mitchell: “The purpose of life is self-actualization – shaping the world in our vision through reaching our full potential.”
- Josh Becker: “The purpose of life is to give it away in the service of others.”
- Luminita Saviuc: “What is the purpose of life?... To love. To truly love. To become one with love and then to radiate that love outwards... To get to a place where, no matter where you look and no matter what you do, you can’t help but feel an overwhelming love towards that which you see and for the things you do.”
- Brendan Baker: “When you connect to a higher purpose that is beyond yourself that’s when life truly begins.”

The author of the article summarized all these answers like this: “It all comes down to one thing — feeling good.” So the purpose of life is about feeling good and you need to go out and figure out what that means for you... Good luck!

People are all over the place in what they think the purpose of life is, and at least in our culture the quest to find that purpose is very subjective and relativistic – there’s no concrete answer that applies to everyone, you need to find it out for yourself.

And because of the influence of our culture, that’s how I think many Christians operate as well. We naturally find things that make us feel good and meaningful and we pursue those things to give us purpose. It could be a successful career; it could be living the American Dream; it could be having a close-knit family; it could be experiencing adventure – it could be a lot of things. And whatever it is ends up consuming our time, money, and attention. It becomes our primary objective and our lives revolve around pursuing it.

Is that what life is all about? Is that why God created us? To live the rest of our lives here on earth seeking after whatever makes us feel good? My hope is that God will use this series to help us see and focus on our real purpose in life. Rather than letting our lives revolve around whatever makes us feel good and meaningful, my hope is that we will begin to intentionally center our lives around the purpose God has given us. God has given us a primary objective for life, and though accomplishing it is going to look different in each of our lives, the goal is

the same. We don't have to go out and try to figure out what the purpose of life is. The one who gave us life in the first place and saved us from our sins has also given us our purpose and the pursuit of that needs to become central in how we live our lives.

So this morning we are going to look at what that purpose is and in the upcoming weeks we'll look at what that looks like in our lives today. To get to the heart of what our purpose in life is I think we need to ask a little different question, and that is this: "Why are we here on earth?" The reason I ask this is that the Bible teaches that we will experience life in two distinct stages. The Bible talks about "this age" referring to life on earth right now, and "the age to come," which is the next life that we enter after we die. So, in this series, we're talking about our purpose in this life on earth right now. We're not talking about the next life. So we're not talking about our purpose for existence in general, which includes this age and the next; we're talking about our purpose for the years God gives us on this earth, and there is a difference.

Many Christians will say our purpose in life is to glorify God. In 1646 a bunch of church leaders got together in England at the Westminster Assembly and put together some doctrinal statements to guide the teachings of the Church of England and what they came up with has been used by many churches since then as the standard for Christian doctrine. Coming out of that they created a catechism, which is kind of like a textbook that teaches doctrine in a question/answer format. The first question is this: What is the chief end of man? And the answer given is this: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. And that's a great answer. But that answer speaks to the purpose of our existence in general – both in this age and in the age to come. We exist to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

I used to think this was also the only answer to what our specific purpose is for this life, and that led me to some good things. It led me to seeing life differently, that God is the center of the universe, not humans, not me, which is the way I used to live. It led me to see that whatever I did, I should do it for the glory of God and to enjoy him more. Whatever I had, I should use it for his glory and to enjoy him more. Life isn't about me – it's not about self-promotion, it's about glorifying God. It's about growing closer to him so that I can enjoy him more.

So that became my motivation for how I lived the Christian life. If I was going to glorify God with my life I needed to do things for his glory and I needed to work on my character – I needed to become more and more like Jesus. I needed to be more godly. And if I was going to enjoy him, I needed to grow in my knowledge of him and in my relationship with him. And these were all good things. And I thought I was accomplishing God's purpose for my life. But I came to realize something was really missing.

If God's purpose for my life was to glorify him and enjoy him forever, I could just live in a Christian cocoon and go off and become a hermit at a monastery somewhere. Then what's the point of remaining on earth? I'm pretty sure I'll glorify God and enjoy him forever much better in heaven, so why are we still here? Why not skip all this and bring us to heaven the moment we are born again? Life on earth can be hard – really hard, filled with suffering, pain, and loss. Most of us will probably get to the point where we'd rather just skip this part and get on to the good stuff in heaven. So, if we're already saved and our home in heaven is secure, then why are we still here? There must be some other reason why God has left us here in addition to glorifying him and enjoying him. And it's not just to wander through life like everyone else trying to figure out how to feel good!

So what is our purpose for this life? How does God want us to glorify him and enjoy him in the days we have left on this earth? To find that answer I think we need to look at what Jesus said to his disciples. They were the first Christians to whom Jesus revealed a whole new way of life. He taught them how to live the Christian life and he taught them what their purpose was – their primary objective in the days they had remaining on this earth.

It's important to see that even though his disciples were already saved from their sins and headed for eternity in heaven, when Jesus ascended to heaven, he didn't take them with him – he left all of them behind. Why would he do that? Oftentimes, in today's Christian culture we act as if the ultimate goal of Christianity is getting people saved. But once we're saved, what do we do? I remember asking myself that as a teenager. Oftentimes people just wait out the rest of their lives doing whatever makes them feel meaningful until they actually get to heaven. But the problem with that is that it really makes this life kind of pointless. If God's primary objective for us in this life is to be saved, then why not take us to heaven right after we become a Christian? The disciples were saved, so why didn't Jesus take them to be with him when he ascended to heaven? It's

because God had an important purpose for them to carry out in their years remaining on this earth. He had a primary objective for them in this life that was to become central to how they lived their lives and how they made decisions. And Jesus began teaching them what that was from early on.

Read Matthew 4:18.

*<sup>18</sup> While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.*

So these were two regular guys – brothers who owned and operated a fishing business on the Sea of Galilee, and their lives revolved around fishing. That’s what gave them meaning. That was their primary objective. So in the eyes of our culture today, they had it figured out – they were accomplishing the purpose of life. No reason to make any changes. Yet Jesus showed up and changed everything. They had already known him for a few weeks at this point, but this was the first time he spoke of what their new purpose was to be.

Read Matthew 4:19-22.

<sup>9</sup> And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

<sup>20</sup> Immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>21</sup> And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.

<sup>22</sup> Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

When Jesus showed up, he called them to follow him – he called them to become Christians (though they didn’t call it that yet) – but in doing that he also called them to take on a new primary objective in life: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” He told them from the outset that following him would mean becoming fishers of men. He didn’t say, “Follow me and you will be saved, and then you can go on living with your fishing career as your primary objective until you die and go to heaven,” he said, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” “I will give you a new central purpose for this life – a new primary objective.”

That’s what it meant to be a follower of Christ, according to Jesus. It wasn’t just about getting saved and becoming a godly person and growing in your relationship with Christ while you live your life doing whatever it is that gives you meaning. It was about realigning your primary purpose to fall in line with his

mission. Following Christ – becoming a Christian – meant becoming a fisher of men.

He taught his first disciples what that meant and what it looked like during his earthly ministry, and then, when his time on earth was nearly complete, he left the church with this same calling in Matthew 28:19-20: *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* This is the same calling as becoming fishers of men. It includes making disciples, baptizing them and teaching them. This is Christ’s call for everyone who decides to follow him.

Now for some he calls them to actually leave where they’re at and leave their career to devote themselves to the mission, but for most of us it means staying where you’re at – in your community, in your neighborhood, in your workplace and school – and learning to live out Christ’s purpose right where you’re at. “Living missionally” is the phrase that is often used. So rather than living for your career or family or hobbies, Christ has called you to primarily live for his mission. Make that your central purpose that everything else revolves around.

In the coming weeks we will dig more into what that means and what that looks like, but for right now I just want you to identify where you’re at in this. As you look at your own life and you see what everything revolves around you will probably be able to identify what your central purpose has been. We naturally fall into these things and for the most part these are good things. For a lot of people it turns out to be your career or your family, maybe your kids or grandkids. For others it might be managing a home or property, or making money, or even pursuing a hobby. It’s that thing that you’re always thinking about that usually trumps everything else when it comes to your calendar and wallet. What is that for you?

It’s probably a good thing, but is it the mission that Christ has given you? “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men...” My hope is that through the next few weeks we will capture a new vision for life that God wants us to pursue during the time we have left here on earth.