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What On Earth Am I Here For?

Ephesians 1:3-12

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“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him **in love**.

He destined us for **adoption as his children** through Jesus Christ, according to the **good pleasure** of his will, to the praise of his glorious **grace that he freely bestowed upon us in the Beloved**. In him we have **redemption** through his blood, the **forgiveness** of our trespasses, according to the **riches of his grace** that he lavished on us.

With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his **good pleasure** that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an **inheritance**, having been **destined according to the purpose** of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were first to **set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.**” Ephesians 1:3-12 (NRSV).

When our family goes to Maine, we always go to one particular restaurant where the food is consistently excellent. You might be surprised that this Maine restaurant isn't known for its lobster or clams, and it isn't located near the water. It is in the corner of a small strip mall in Westbrook and it is called Panda Garden. Their Chinese food is fabulous and of course for dessert we all get fortune cookies. Sometimes I keep fortunes I like and carry them in my wallet until they fall out or I stick them in a desk drawer. Ones I don't like, don't fit, or aren't stunningly complimentary I assume were meant for someone else. Often times as a family we will exchange them if we think we should have someone else's. Fortune cookies are probably about at the level of horoscopes as far as how general and vague they are and of course they include lucky numbers for you to bet in the lottery as well – these are not things to build a life on.

“It's time you asked that special someone out on a date.

You achieve great peace of mind when you talk with an old friend.

Ideas are like your children. Yours are always the best.”

Fortune cookies can be interesting...

Drama - The Fortune, with Joan Spilman and Stefan Vogel.

As much as I like Chinese food, I wouldn't build my life on fortune cookie wisdom. The theme I'd like us to *chew* on this morning, is **what on earth am I here for?** What is the purpose of my life? The prophet Jeremiah asked in a moment of despair (Jeremiah 20:18), "*Why was I born? Was it only to have trouble and sorrow, to end my life in disgrace?*" There are times we may feel that way as well. Was I born just to have heartache, grief, and stress? Was I born just to pursue pleasure and material prosperity?

A few years ago when BBC member Earl Caudill was a student at the University of Kentucky, he had a roommate named Hugh Moorhead. Hugh went on to become the Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at Northwestern University and while there he wrote to 250 well-known philosophers, scientists, writers and intellectuals and asked them, "*What is the Purpose of Life?*" About half of them responded and many offered guesses while others said they had no clue and that if Dr. Moorhead knew would he please let them know. **I believe we discover the purpose of life when we put God first in our life.**

Jeremiah 17:7-8 and Psalm 1 both use the image of a strong healthy tree to describe what a life that puts God first looks like. "*Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. **It shall not fear** when the heat comes, and **its leaves shall stay green**; in the year of drought **it is not anxious**, and it does not cease to **bear fruit**" (Jeremiah 17:7-8).*

Jeremiah says, those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord, shall not fear, will not be anxious, and shall bear fruit throughout their lives.

The first step to finding out who God wants us to be and what God wants us to do is trusting and believing that our life begins with God and because of God and our hope now and forever lies in the Lord. We were "*made by God and for God – and until you understand that, life will never make sense. It is only in God that we discover our origin, our identity, our meaning, our purpose, our significance, and our destiny.*"¹

As we start these 40 days it is crucially important to understand that "*God made you so God could love you. This is a truth to build your life on.*"

¹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, page 18.

We are created to be loved by God. 1 John tells us “God is love.” “Love is the essence of God’s character.” and God wanted to create something to love so God created us. God wasn’t lonely, God didn’t need us, but God wanted us.

Not only are we created for love – to be lovers of God and lovers of God’s children. God also has meaningful work and ministry for us to accomplish.

The prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 49:4a) says in a moment of depression, “*My work all seems so useless. I’ve spent my strength for nothing and for no purpose at all.*” Many of us have felt that way at one point or another. Even someone like Isaiah who was clearly called by God to a specific mission and purpose had discouraging days. If you don’t have meaning and purpose in your life and you don’t know why God put you on this planet, life doesn’t make much sense and can even more discouraging.

People can go through life at different levels. Many folks live in **survival mode** – putting in their time, living for the weekend, controlled by their circumstances. Some folks my age can remember a song, “*Everybody’s Working for the Weekend.*” The lyrics went on to describe how everyone wants a new romance, and then offering “a piece of my heart” and “a piece of my soul” to anyone who was willing. That song always bothered me. **If you’re working and living for the weekend, you’re wasting at least 5/7ths of your life. I don’t want to have meaning, purpose, significance or love just 2/7ths of my life.** Secondly, most of us don’t need a new romance every weekend as badly as we need a relationship with God who is love and with Jesus the lover of our souls. We don’t want to live in survival mode.

A step up from living at a survival level is the **Success level**. By the world’s standards this is where many of us are on Cape Cod. Compared to the rest of the world we have great freedom, a very comfortable living, possessions, and good health. Jesus said in a parable (Mark 4:1-9, 13-20) that some folks who hear his teaching are like seeds sown among thorns (4:18-19): “*these are ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing.*” Those of us who live in the United States must be on our guard lest we become like seeds sown among thorns who are allured, tempted, and distracted by material success so that God’s word doesn’t bear fruit in us as it should.

As followers of Jesus we want to be on a third level of living and that is **significance. Not survival or success but significance.** We live at the level of **significance when we know how much we matter to and are loved by God, and when we know God's purposes for our life and we're living them out.**

According to an AP online story, the pope who suffered from Parkinson's disease and crippling hip and knee ailments, wrote in 2000 about weighing retirement and trying to discern what the Lord wanted him to do. He said he hoped the Lord "*Would help me to recognize how long I must continue this service to which he called me the day of 16 October, 1978.*" He also prayed at the time that he would have the "necessary strength" to continue his mission as long as he was serving as pope. While the pope was blessed to live to the age of 84, all of us are not so fortunate. **We want to discover why we're alive, what we're on earth for, and why our lives matter as soon as we can because we don't know how long our life will last.**

Knowing our purpose in life not only gives meaning and focus to our life, it also prepares us for eternity.

John Schintzius, the grandson of BBC members Harry and Jean Mirick enrolled at Western New England College this past fall. From the time he was an elementary school student, John loved playing soccer and basketball, however, as a boy he was diagnosed with Systemic Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis, an autoimmune disease of the joints and internal organs for which there is no known cause or cure. Months of treatments included taking prednisone which among other side effects, triggered Type 1 Diabetes. John had to learn a whole new way of eating as well as how to give himself daily injections of insulin. While he had to change positions, he could still participate in team sports through eighth grade. At age 14, John had a total hip replacement before his first year of high school. John went through incredible physical trials and constantly fought against fatigue and anemia. John had his other hip replaced at the age of 18.

In his college application essay John wrote in part, "*Throughout my life I have been active in church and youth programs. **I consider my faith in God to be critical in facing challenges.** Prayers from friends, teachers, and family have sustained me through the toughest days. Through perseverance, courage and faith in God, I have developed the fortitude to face the challenges of my medical*

*conditions. Yes, I've had a few strikes along the way, but I've learned to hit the curveballs and get on base. I've been taught not to steal, but **I want to hit home runs, not just for my sake, but also for the benefit of others. I look forward to a dynamic college experience that will be my next training ground on my way to a successful future.***"

In September as part of his first-year Business Seminar John had to write a Personal Mission Statement. John wrote the following in **defining and articulating his purpose in life**: "To find happiness, fulfillment, and value in living I will:

LEAD a life centered on the principles of honesty, fairness, trustworthiness, and patience.

REMEMBER what is important in life is family, spiritual fulfillment, happiness, respect, and personal growth.

REVERE admirable characteristics in others, such as being caring, faithful, loyal, respectful, compassionate, and truthful, and attempt to implement similar characteristics in my own life.

RECOGNIZE my strengths and develop talents as a person who is clever, intelligent, kind, reliable, sincere, and humorous.

HUMBLE myself by acknowledging that I can be a procrastinator, pessimistic, and fearful and by constantly striving to transform my weaknesses into strengths.

I will – respect my elders and would want others to respect me.

I will – always treat my mom with love and care and thank her for all she has done for me.

I will – always take care of my sister and protect her.

I will – love my family and others close to me no matter what.

I will – care for people and treat family and friends the way I would want to be treated.

I will – strive to do well in college and become well educated for future work experience.

I will – never lose faith in God.

I will – stay focused throughout my life and that will help me become a better person.

I will – continue to be a conscientious student.

I will – always take care and love my mom because she has loved me so much."

Shortly after finishing his first semester, John went into the hospital on January 3 and tragically died on January 6, just two months after celebrating his 19th birthday. John

didn't have the opportunity to fulfill some of his desires, yet he accomplished virtually everything he hoped to in terms of **who he was as a young man following Christ and having faith in God.**

John Schintzius knew what on earth he was here for; he expressed it so eloquently in his mission statement. He also had the faith to know God made him to last forever and he wanted to know God better. Hebrews 11:6 says, "*Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him **must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.***" I believe John was rewarded for seeking God.

If you want to know your purpose in life, start getting to know God now. The more you get to know God, the more you're going to understand God's ways and wisdom and the more you're going to understand the meaning and purpose of life. The next 40 days have the potential to change your life. Believing that God created us for the Lord's purposes and that the best use of my life is fulfilling those purposes I hope you will commit in the next 40 days to doing the daily reading in the Purpose Driven Life book, participating in a home group, if you're not in one it's still not too late to sign up, just go to the 40 Days display in the lobby after worship and we will help you get into a group this week. I hope you will make it to worship for the next six weeks, as we will be setting up what we read and study about each week individually and in the home groups. It will take less than 48 hours of time to do all those things. The rest of our life and the rest of our eternity are worth 48 hours of our time now.

I feel deeply blessed to be a pastor and to be fulfilling what God has called me to do. Yesterday at 4:00 pm I had the joy of joining Kim Reynolds and Andrew Swenson in Christian marriage after getting to know them a little as we met over the last few months. Andy and Kim attend our 10:30 service and they are young and in love and they have we pray many decades of life together ahead of them. Then at 2:35 am this morning I received a call from Joan Clarke saying that her husband Ken had died at Cape Cod Hospital. So I drove to the hospital and took that painful walk into the CCU with Joan and her children to say goodbye, shed our tears, hear words of faith from the Bible, and to pray and give thanks for Ken and for the hope we have of eternal life with Jesus.

As I drove back from the hospital, the night sky was spectacular – absolutely clear, no moon, the stars and constellations all over the heavens. I remembered a story I

read about a little girl visiting her grandmother in the country. One evening they sat and enjoyed the panorama of stars in the heavens sparkling brilliantly unlike the girl had ever seen living in the city with all the lights. The girl was awe in of their beauty and said to her grandmother, **“If heaven is so beautiful on the wrong side, what must it be like on the right side?”** Truly it will be beyond our imagination.

In his paraphrase of the New Testament called *The Message*, Eugene Peterson states Ephesians 1:11 this way, *“It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ, ...he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.”*

All of us are at different stages of our spiritual journey and in different seasons of our life, but we’re going to go through this 40 Days journey together. Some of you are unsure about the whole thing, but you’re willing to check it out. That’s great. Bring your questions and thoughts to your group to discuss them. Whether you’re a seeker, a brand new believer or a strong believer, the door to a deeper relationship with God is open.

God had a purpose in bringing you here today. God wants to be in relationship with us and for us to live out the Lord’s purposes for us now and for eternity.

Let’s pray together:

“Dear God, I realize that if it weren’t for you. I wouldn’t be alive. But because you made me, you must have a purpose for me. I admit that at times I focus on my plans for my life, not yours. But I want to know who you want me to be and what you want me to do, so I commit the next 40 days of my life to learning about it. Thank you for making me so you could love me. Thank you for caring for me when I didn’t know or care for you. Thank you for making me to last forever. I want a life filled with meaning. I know that starts by getting to know you better. So as best I understand, I ask you, Jesus, to come into my life and help me to know and live your purposes for me. I am taking the first step today, in your name I pray, Amen.”