

Life's Purpose

Life is a gift from God. As it's a gift, we live solely according to God's grace and holy will. He can end life by revoking the gift at any time. Our response to this gift should be to honor and thank the Giver, regardless what circumstances surround the gift or what particular abilities (or disabilities and burdens) come with the gift.

But *why* the gift? God certainly gave us the gift to accomplish something of supreme importance, because everything that God does is purposeful. That means that life has a purpose, one that derives from God's own great purpose in creating. Let's think about the purpose of life.

When God originally made us, He evidently intended that we should enjoy the gift. We were to live it at peace with one another and with Him, that is, in His presence. We were to delight in all the splendor and wisdom of God's very good creation. Life was to be a prolonged joyous experience. The most precious part of life was the privilege of knowing God, of delighting in Him, of being blessed by His infinitely perfect and beautiful Person. God created us to enjoy Him.

Yet, God also gave us responsibilities. God is a morally perfect Being. He also is a God who speaks, and He gave His word to us. Obedience to the words of the One who created all things and who lovingly gave us life was fully expected. So God gave us instructions by which to live. We were made "in God's image" so that, as a mirror reflects an image, as we obeyed Him, thus imitating His goodness, we would reflect the glory of God. We also were given work to do. It was not onerous or risky, but it was work to be done on God's behalf.

He also placed a test before us. It's described in the opening pages of the Bible. A test was necessary because He endowed us with free will. Justice requires that the freedom to make choices, particularly moral and relational ones, carries with it both responsibilities and accountability. Would what God had said control our thinking and our behavior? Would we live and act as God instructed? Or not? His Word represented His Person. To obey His words would honor Him. But not to obey would be to reject Him; it would repudiate His goodness and His glory.

Well, that test not only didn't go well, it was a catastrophe of cosmic significance. Evil, in the person of a supernatural being, invaded God's very good creation. In essence, that evil being said, "Never mind what God said. Never mind God." Listening to that other's voice, and adopting that wicked idea distorted everything. By disobeying God's word, our moral awareness was corrupted, so we acquired a tendency to sin called a "sin nature." And we transferred loyalty from God to that evil supernatural being. Our fall into sin ruptured the fellowship we had with our Creator; it caused alienation even among ourselves. Worse, God had to curse His lovely creation to thwart humans from using their considerable God-given powers to promote and spread evil. Filled with anger, God also decreed death as a judgment of sin. The gift of life would be limited. And He expelled His beloved human creatures from His presence. The purpose God had for us at creation seems to have come to an abrupt end. It didn't though. It was just placed in abeyance.

So we now inhabit a dysfunctional and dangerous world that has only a faint resemblance to the very good creation it originally was. We pass our lives offending God with the sins and failures that flow from our sin nature, surrounded by invisible evil beings that continually tempt us to sin, in a cursed world that deliberately frustrates us at every turn. And we die. It's in this sad and grievous setting that we have the gift of life. And we're still to pursue it according to God's will. That hasn't changed. Although we're alienated from God, He nevertheless expects us to live according to His standard of goodness. In the Bible, which is His voice, how He speaks to us, He's revealed how we're to live and what kind of people we're to be.

So life is like a stewardship. It's entrusted to us to use in a way that fulfills what God intended. As a stewardship, we'll be held accountable at the end of life for how we used the gift. To say it differently, life is like probation, a period of testing. Tests reveal what our hearts are like. Are we living for the things that matter to us, or for what matters to God? Indeed, a day of reckoning awaits every person, when we'll have to render an account of what we did with the gift while we had it. We do not have the gift of life to squander on selfish pursuits or in ways that don't honor Him. God is good, but He is dangerous to those who ignore Him.

Our great problem is, we all fail. Our sin nature expresses itself differently in different people, but it's there in all of us. It unavoidably dominates us. We can't live according to His revealed moral standard. We don't obey His will that's written for us in Scripture. Or, ignoring His Word, we pretend He's indifferent to how we live. Some of us pretend God is not even there. We invent all kinds of -isms and imaginary narratives to try to avoid God. That "Never mind what God said."

Never mind God" is still in control. We can't please God with good deeds because our sins massively outnumber them; our sins are a constant affront to a holy God. We can't do anything but outrageously offend Him. Yet God still loves us! Although filled with wrath at our sins and rebellions, which justice demands that He punish, God loves His human creatures. So He extends grace.

God doesn't allow death to end our existence. Death is a separation: at death our soul separates from the body. The body undergoes decay, but each person's soul continues to exist forever. Life after death awaits every human because God made us to live forever. He exists eternally, and so will we. Everyone will experience a resurrection. We will find ourselves in God's presence, and our lives will be judged and a determination made of our ultimate destiny. Determined how?

In love, God took the initiative to deal with sin. In the person of Jesus, Israel's promised Messiah (Christ), who is God, entered His creation. Assuming a human nature, he took on himself all sin and suffered the just wrath of God against sin by dying on a Roman cross. His death was substitutionary. That is, his death substituted for the eternal death that each of us justly deserves. Because he is deity, Jesus' death had infinite value, able to atone for all sin. In other words, God Himself came to rescue us from Himself! Jesus then rose from the dead and lives today in heaven, waiting for a certain day in the future (perhaps very soon) when he will return to establish a millennial period of peace and righteousness on earth.

So the great issue in life, the one exceedingly serious issue is, will we trust in the perfect person of Christ Jesus and what he accomplished for us 2,000 years ago on a cross. Or will we face a God offended by our repudiation of the responsibilities expected of us. Either we go to God having failed to live as we were supposed to, exposed to just condemnation, or we cling to the gracious rescue from judgment that God extends in the Person and work of Christ. God reprises with us today that primeval test: Will we humbly believe God's Word, what He says in the Bible that the Son did for us, or will we proudly ignore or reject His Word.

Believing in Christ, God's gracious provision for our greatest need, results in the forgiveness of sin, freedom from the *power* of sin, and a new and precious relationship with God. And the resurrection of Christ makes a radically new life available to us. Again, the life is a gift, but it's one now that involves the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's expectations and empowerment to obey His revealed will. Knowing we have a glorious future in intimate relationship with the Creator makes this life peaceful, comprehensible and fulfilling.

And if we've trusted in Christ, stewardship *again* confronts us. Because of the great privileges that come with salvation, we have an even *heightened* responsibility. God doesn't take us away to heaven the day we trust Christ. He leaves us here to serve Him. We aren't here as spectators! We've been given tasks, and responsible Christians are engaged in them. The parable of the Ten Minas (Luke 19:11-27) exemplifies this stewardship. **"From whom much has been given, much is required"** (Luke 12:48; see also 16:10). Christ expects His followers to obey His teachings and commands. Clearly stated in God's Word are the purposes for Christians in this life. We're here, for example, to grow in Christ-likeness and holiness, by which we glorify God and proleptically anticipate our sinless, future state. As the Body of Christ, His hands, feet and mouth, we continue the mission of the Incarnate Son. And as priests we intercede for others and mediate God's blessings to others. These are just a few of the ways we serve God while we await the glorious day when we are transported to the greatest reality of all, our eternal life.

What all this means is, because of the entrance of sin and evil and the judgments that God's justice necessitated, the great existence for which we were made is that which is to come. The life of blessing in God's presence occurs in a reality that's on the other side of death. It will be in a future existence that we experience the ineffable joy of being with God as He fully shares His love with us.

When those trusting in Christ are resurrected, they won't any longer have a corrupting sin nature, and they'll have a new body. So they'll be fit to be in the presence of a holy God and dwell in a new heaven and a new earth. Even better, God evidently intends to have us participate in some way in the Godhead. We'll become "partakers of the divine nature." (We have to await its fulfillment to know exactly what that means. But it must mean that, in grace, God intends to exalt us beyond anything we can imagine.) God's great purposes for us then will be fulfilled.

So our purpose in this life is to get safely to the next existence by trusting in the Person and work of Christ. Only if we're *in Christ*, the beloved Son of God, can we escape God's just wrath and instead enjoy wonderful blessing.