

The Purpose of Life in Seven Words

I had this strange but I suspect profoundly meaningful dream last night. I was looking at the comics page of a newspaper, a page full of strip cartoons (none of which were funny) and then, strangely, I was in one of the cartoons. It was a room full of people and I knew no one, although there was one familiar face. They all were eating sweet treats and ignored me. Then I was driving at night in the rain in a downtown area, and I stopped along the side of a street to look at a map. I didn't understand the map so I ignored it. A police car then stopped behind me, but not with his lights flashing. I asked the officer if it's OK to drive on. He said, "Sure," then asked, "Where are you going?" "I don't know." "Where are you coming from?" "Don't know that either." "Do you know where you are?" "Nope." I then drove on. The officer ran after me to try to help, but I turned onto another street and evaded him. And then I woke up. And, once awake, I realized that this dream characterizes the spiritual state of almost everyone in our world today. That includes too many in our churches, who don't know why they're here or why they're here.

Unbelievers are lost. Totally lost. They're here to have fun, to be happy, and to live comfortably and maybe somehow usefully. But they're deeply alienated from each other, and they have no meaningful sense of purpose in life. They are living a cartoon existence, on a journey but don't know from where, to where or why. And they don't want help. It's tragic beyond description, beyond understanding. But believers too seem to be in the same sad state. No sense of purpose in life. So, my dream provoked this Sunday School lesson, in the hope that believers, at least, might accept help.

We want to reflect on the motto of Columbia Bible College, "To Know Him and Make Him Known." These seven words crystallize what a believer's goal in life should be. We don't need a PhD in theology or a lifetime of Bible study to find a more clear and concise statement of life's purpose. We're here to know Christ and to take the knowledge of Christ to others. All else is either peripheral or puff.

Jesus is the greatest and most wonderful Person in the history of humanity. He is the greatest reality there is in all existence. Where did we come from? We came from God. Where are we going? Back to God. We can argue endlessly about the soul's origin, but it's not necessary. We came from God. And we can argue endlessly about eschatology, but it's not necessary. We're going back to God. And in between, the life we have, the reason we're here, is to know Jesus, the risen, living Messiah and Savior, and to share that knowledge with every one that we can. There's nothing more exalted anyone can do in life than that. There's no greater privilege, no greater good anyone can do, no greater desire or achievement anyone can have in life than "To know Him and make Him known."

God created humanity as His image for (at least) this purpose: so that we can relate to Him in some real and meaningful way. We're comparable to God in certain ways that make us able to know Him and to enjoy Him. That's something other creatures cannot do. Evidently it was God's creational intent that humanity's great pleasure or blessing in life was to be in intimate fellowship with our infinitely great Creator. But God also created humanity to serve Him. God is the transcendent Ruler of His cosmos, but He placed us, uniquely endowed creatures, here on earth with the special responsibility to act on His behalf to carry out His will for His creation. That would include rule over the physical and animal world and the formation of a society of humans all in relationship to one another and to God. The entry of evil and the fall into sin disrupted this order, but the creational intent remained. And so a long history ensued through which sovereignly ordained events anticipated God's restoring the intended creational order. That was eventually realized when God actually, miraculously, entered into His time-and-space creation in the unique person of Jesus.

The Father uniquely loves the Son and Jesus exactly reveals the Father whom He loves. Jesus is the ideal and perfect image and likeness of the Father. So to know Jesus is to know God. But what does it mean, "to know"? To us today, to know (something or someone) means simply to have an awareness. It's an intellectual (or cognitive) function. In Scripture, however, to "know" means to be intimately involved with another person. It means to be in a loving, trusting, intimate, personal relationship. So to know God doesn't mean merely to be aware of His existence, but to know what He's like, and to honor Him, love Him and trust Him. And this: to want to be with Him. So, to know Jesus is all these things. The New Testament writers use "believe" to refer to what we're saying is "To know Him."

To know Jesus is to love Him. That's because He is lovely in every way. His character; His thoughts, values, and teachings; *everything* He said and did; everything about Him is perfect. He's the ideal Person. And if we love Him, we'll submit to His wisdom and goodness and obey Him. We'll trust His words and His promises because He is God and cannot lie, and whatever He says must – MUST – come true. So to know Jesus is life-changing. No one who knows Him (in the Scriptural sense) is the same kind of person as he was prior to the encounter. And to know Jesus is to want to be with Him, to be in His presence, to see Him, to hear Him, to delight in Him. To experience Him. To know Jesus is the greatest and most transcending, the most exalting thing, that any person can do in life.

Paul's magnificent obsession was Christ, **"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection."** Paul's only desire in life was to be ever more intimate with Christ, to experience Him in ever greater measure. May Paul's obsession also be ours! The "power of his resurrection" refers to the new life, Jesus' resurrection life, the very life of the Son, that's imparted to all who know Him.

To know Jesus is to enter into a union with Him that, because He is deity, lasts forever. He takes us to the Father so that we participate in some way in the godhead. The Father's love for us who love His Son is infinitely great, resulting in future blessings no one today can anticipate or imagine. Knowing Jesus fulfills the creational intent of *koinonia*, or fellowship, between us and our Creator.

And if we know Jesus, we'll want to make Him known. In love and gratitude (and obedience), we'll want others to know Jesus too. We'll desire that supremely, because His infinitely great love indwells us and impels us to lovingly share Jesus with others. Our love for Jesus moves us to want to see others also knowing Jesus, for that exalts Him. No greater work can occupy us in life than sharing the knowledge of Jesus, in the hope that others will be thrilled and blessed at knowing Him. After all, it's God's creational intent that we form a society of people in relationship to each other and to God. So our creational responsibility, if not our salvational responsibility, is to share the Gospel with those who've never heard it. The ultimate goal is a vast family of glorified creatures, all in intimate, eternal fellowship with each other and with God.

The very first law given in the Mosaic Law (Exodus 21:1-6), right after the Ten Commandments, pictures our relationship to Jesus. This law states that when a Hebrew servant completes his six-years term of servitude but he loves his master, he doesn't have to go free but can voluntarily commit himself to a life-time of service to that master. If the master was a good and wise man, the servant should realize that his life would be best spent serving that man. When we realize what an extraordinarily good, wise and loving Person Jesus is, and that the work He has for us is of surpassing importance, we too voluntarily commit to serving Him for our life-time. There simply is no better way to spend a life.

Something else: God is good. One of the main purposes He has in creating is the defeat of all evil. It's His intent that when this physical cosmos comes to an end, evil will no longer exist, only good, God's goodness. So knowing Jesus and making Him known is how we turn our backs on the (innate, default) side of evil and enter into the side of good. We take God's side by knowing Jesus (again, in the Scriptural sense) and sharing that knowledge with others. As others respond to our testimony and come to know Jesus, they too join God in His defeat of evil. There's nothing greater to do in life, no greater purpose in living, than participating in this cosmic work of God.

I conclude with this. There's a spiritual truth implicit in Scripture that we need to acknowledge. It's this, God had to actually demonstrate His singular and transcendent love toward us by condescending to enter His physical creation and suffer humiliation. He had to reveal His perfections by means of a real, living, perfect person. Thus Abraham had to demonstrate by how he lived that he believed God. And the Israelites had to demonstrate their obedience to the Law in order to dwell in the Land. Likewise we need to demonstrate our participation in God's work of defeating evil. This demonstration has to happen in this life, in this time-and-space physical world. We need to demonstrate that we know Christ, that we have new life in Him, and that we take as our purpose in life the explicit, revealed will of God. We have to demonstrate our godliness. And so, as we imitate God, we glorify God.