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WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LIFE?– Part 1 (John 1:19 – 34)

Billions of people in our world mindlessly move through the motions of life's existence with little or no purpose. Working, eating, sleeping, partying, parenting, shopping, playing, watching television and other activities are done every day just to be duplicated the next day and the day after that. But why are we really here? What's the purpose to life?

Henry David Thoreau said, "Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them." The Bible says this doesn't have to be and holds the answer to the purpose of life. The example of John the Baptist in this study's text shows a man who knew why he was on the planet.

KNOW WHO YOU ARE NOT

John 1:19-22 - And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

John the Baptist acknowledged an important thing here. He wasn't the Messiah, even though he was teaching repentance and baptizing people. These Jewish religious leaders seem confused as to John's identity and purpose, but John has no ambiguity at all in his mind. Consider these quotes from John as he viewed himself in relation to Christ:

John 3:30 – He must increase, but I must decrease.

John 1:27 – It is he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.

John 1:30 – This is He on behalf of whom I said, "After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for he existed before me."

We must also be careful to know who we are not. Any time we take the reins of our destiny and decisions without consulting God, we in effect replace Him. How many people live life this way? Thoughts of God and His ways may never shape the worldview of many in our world, but I encourage you not to take the role of God in your life. We are not our own masters; we do not ultimately decide our destiny or purpose.

John is a tremendous illustration of humility and submission. By nature, we humans do not like to be told what to do, but the key to understanding why we exist is to bow our knee to our Creator and willingly place ourselves under His sovereign design and care.

KNOW YOUR PURPOSE

John 1:23-28— He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

When John did finally explain himself to the leaders, he was direct and full of confidence. They were relying on Jewish teaching from the Old Testament to get their answers, but John used his opportunity here to point them to Christ, the Messiah. He knew his purpose.

We all have gifting and special callings on our lives as well. Based on our skill, temperament, location, interests, and spiritual gifts, we can be just as confident about what we should be doing with our lives.

For those who follow Christ, this is done in all of life, but finds a particular expression in the church:

*Romans 12:6-8 – **Having gifts that differ** according to the grace given to us, **let us use them:** if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*

Paul also pointed out God’s intentionality in redeeming those who trust in Christ. There is no question that the Bible teaches a design and purpose for mankind.

*Ephesians 2:10 - For we are his workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.***

In a larger sense, though, we are all designed for the same thing: **the glory of God**. Earlier as we discussed John 1:1-18, we came across the word “glory” several times. It has a meaning of significance, of weight or impression. When we live for God’s glory rather than our own by treasuring Him and His ways, we reject the inborn desire to promote ourselves first. That is a purpose to which all humans have been called.

In his book *Desiring God*, John Piper writes this:

He created us “in His image” so that we would image forth His glory in the world. We were made to be prisms refracting the light of God’s glory into all of life. Why God should want to give us a share in shining with His glory is a great mystery. Call it grace or mercy or love – it is an unspeakable wonder. Once we were not. Then we existed – for the glory of God!

So, there is a tremendous decision we each must make every day we’re alive. Will we seek to glorify ourselves or glorify God? Will we promote ourselves or promote him? Will we seek to convince others of our significance or seek to convince others of his significance?

The Bible refers to God as a jealous God, for example in this passage:

*Exodus 34:14 - (for you shall worship no other god, for **the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God**)*

Why is that important? We usually use the word “jealous” to describe a vain person who doesn’t get noticed like they want to be. But with God the right to be jealous is based on something completely different. He is the only one who has the right to demand his glory is recognized. When he addressed Israel and called himself by the very name Jealous, he was making the irrefutable point that he does not bear any rival. He is a severe avenger of anyone who departs from him and his glory, and this is just.

He said the same thing to Israel hundreds of years later, referring to his judgment on them.

*Isaiah 48:11 - For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? **My glory I will not give to another.***

And later in the book of John, the very sincerity of our belief hinges on our desire to see God glorified instead of ourselves.

*John 5:44 - **How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?***

The purpose of life is, simply put, to make much of God. It’s why mankind was originally created, although we have strayed from that original intent of the Creator. In the next study, we will continue to consider the example of John the Baptist, a man who clearly understood the purpose of life.