Finding Your Life Purpose [1]

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In this article, a brief explanation of how to find your purpose in life.

As each individual has a unique, first person perspective, it is a natural to wonder about our own, unique, individual purposes. What we do matters, and must matter, in one way or another.

This is an essential topic addressed in religions. In essence: in Islam, the purpose is to wholly surrender and follow Allah1. In Buddhism, the purpose is to slay all desires and wanting, with an ultimate purpose of escaping the cycle of reincarnation (*samsara*)2.

The Bible is fairly clear about the purpose of life. We can turn to two texts. The first is the book of Ecclesiates. In this book—which can be read as a piece of existentialist writing—the Preacher examines all the fleeting pleasures and accomplishments of life and bitterly determines that they are all "meaningless, a chasing after the wind". The book concludes thus:

> Furthermore, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. This is the end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgement, with every hidden thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil.
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> Ecclesiates 12:12–14

This article takes for granted existence of (a good, creator) God, good and evil, and final judgement (these are discussed elsewhere in the Bible). The purpose of life is to follow God and keep His commandments.

Jesus echoes this when He responds to a question from a teacher of the Jewish Law:

> One of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him. "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. A second likewise is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' The whole law and the

> prophets depend on these two commandments."
>
> Matthew 22:35–40

Here we see Jesus hearkening back to the old Jewish Law. He highlights two laws which are not arbitrary, but essentially encapsulates all the other laws. All other laws are merely specifics around these two. Again, there is much to be unpacked around all of this. For example, human beings (our "neighbours") are created in God's image, which has a twofold implication: God has an incredible love for them, and our actions against other people reflect as if they were towards God Himself. I have written about this in previous articles, which can be referenced for more details (e.g. see my article What is Sin? [2]). Thus the primacy of these two commandments result from the fact that they, really, are all rooted in the same thing: God's glory.

So, according to the Christian worldview, what is the purpose of life?[3]

1. Because God is the creator, life-giver and sustainer, He determines the purpose and meaning of life.
2. God commands human beings that we honour Him, and take care of each other[4].

Yet it seems to me that this is not always a satisfying answer for many people, even Christians. To some it might be satisfying, but it is not exciting. For those who do not find it satisfying, it is too vague and does not speak to their *personal* life purpose.

To address both of these concerns, we need to remember that Christians are called to do a number of things: to proclaim God's word, to take care of the sick and needy, to promote peace and harmony, to bring healing to the world, to steward God's good creation, etc. And we are called to do *all* of those things. Of course, we can impossibly do everything with equal dedication and proficiency, but we have enough to occupy ourselves.

Recently a friend shared that he and his wife had set aside a particular part of their weekly schedule to dedicate themselves to do something for God's Kingdom. They were just waiting for Him to reveal to them what it is that they should be doing.

I am not sure what kind of revelation they were expecting. I was a bit puzzled by the attitude of passively waiting for God to reveal what it is that they should be doing. I think that this is something that many Christians do, and that it is the wrong approach.

I wish to provide an illustration:

Imagine that a friend of yours has bought a fix-me-upper house. The place looks like a wreck: outside the grass is overgrown and weeds dominate the flowerbeds. Inside, the floor is strewn with broken glass from several of the windows. Ugly, though at least faded, wallpaper is peeling off of the walls. As you walk down the hallway, you notice one of the wall sockets hanging precariously on some electrical wires. In the corner of one of the bedrooms, the wooden floor is rotten. The main bedroom has a badly stained carpet, and the closet doors hang on tired hinges which long ago gave up pretending that they make a difference in the world. Not to mention that the bed is covered in dust, because the ceiling above it is caving in. The bathroom has several broken tiles, and the toilet bowl has a large crack in it, rendering it almost useless. In the kitchen, the sink is missing a tap. And so on.

There is *a lot* of work to be done. You begin to regret having volunteered to help your friend with the restoration of the house. But then you see her face gleaming: underneath all the chaos, she sees potential; something beautiful; a swan which needs to have its baby down dusted off of it.

It again needs to be stressed that much needs to be done. Your friend is busy pulling up timbers in the one bedroom. You have two options: stand around and wait for her to tell you what to do, or get busy with the first thing that needs to be done

If you keep bugging your friend every 30 minutes for the next task, you won't only be interrupting her from what she is doing, but you will become a bit of a nuisance.

Rather, grab a broom, and start sweeping up the broken glass. Find a screwdriver to remove the broken hinges so that you can go get new ones from the hardware store. Start pulling off the wallpaper. If the wallpaper has already been torn down, pick up a roller and start painting. Rip up the carpet (assuming your friend doesn't want to keep it!).

If you make a mistake (for example, you start painting the walls without applying a primer first), someone will correct you quickly enough[5].

And of course, there are things that you *shouldn't* do. If you don't know anything about electrics, *stay away from the broken socket*! Then again, perhaps you do know something which the other people don't: perhaps you know a thing or two about plumbing, and you are the perfect person to replace the toilet and install a new mixer tap in the kitchen.

Even if you show up late to the party, and inside the house it is such a hive of activity that you would only be getting in the way, you can always find the lawnmower and cut the grass, or weed the garden.

I can promise you that no task is too small, too menial, for your friend to *not* appreciate you helping out. It will take several days of hard, almost non-stop work to get the house fixed up. But when you are done, it will be spectacular to behold!

This is exactly the situation in which we find ourselves. It is no accident that God invited you to be in the world at this particular point in history. Looking around, there is much brokenness, tiredness and ignorance in the world. Everything you do in faith, love, truth and obedience is to the goodness of the Kingdom of God. The physical world is not a failed experiment which God intends to toss out; rather, it is *His* good creation which has been marred by *our* sin. And He invites *us* to partner with *Him* to accomplish the same purpose of righting the wrongs as far as possible.

Perhaps you do have a special gift. Perhaps your heart burns for missionary work; most Christians' don't, which makes you a precious volunteer. Perhaps you are gifted at teaching, or reaching out to drug addicts. You should absolutely pursue a ministry in those areas. But remember, if you cannot do one particular thing now, there is always something else to do. There is always a floor to be swept or grass which needs to be cut; there is always someone in need of kindness, a lonely person who wishes there was someone around to listen to them, dishes which need to be done after a church service...

Do not stand around waiting for God to tell you what to do. Start with something, and if you are needed elsewhere, He will call you (He is good at doing that!). Many people have led non-linear ministries, ending up in a different place from where they started. And with the help of mentors, try something new, unfamiliar, and daunting[6]. (Have you ever considered prison ministry?) Perhaps you don't know anything about plumbing, but then realise replacing a tap isn't that difficult. Perhaps you do not know how to relate to children, but getting involved in children's ministry reveals a knack which you did not know you had.

Honour God; take up the broom, and sweep!

- 1. This is what the word "islam" means.
- 2. These descriptions may be grossly oversimplified, but I do trust that they are not incorrect or misleading. There indeed exist volumes explaining, expound and detailing these points and the multitude of nuances around them.
- 3. The intention of this article is not to derive the purpose of life, but to take it at face value as the Bible gives it. The purpose of this article is to advise around the personal implications of all of this.
- 4. Which has a whole host of implications: Christian attitudes towards other Christians, non-

Christians, the environment, etc.; all should be viewed through the lens of honouring God the creator.

- 5. This is why we should always be working in view of other people, not in isolation.
- 6. In my denomination, "apprenticeships" are programmes for people who want to explore whether they are suited for a "career" in full-time ministry. One of the goals is a breadth of experience in all the available ministries in the church: nothing is assumed to be unsuitable until *proven* so.

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