

# The Purpose Of Humanity (1)

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] So for a wee while tonight, please turn back to Psalm 73, and I'm going to read verses 23-26. Nevertheless, I am continually with you. You hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward, you'll receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there's nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. In our evening services just now, we are doing a series called The Real Us, and we've taken that title because today people will often talk about the real you, and to discover the real you is a good thing in the eyes of our culture, and that ties in a lot with the dominant forces in our society just now, individualism, being the person that you are, self-identity, all that kind of stuff, and in our society, being the real you is a good thing to be.

There's a big value on being true to yourself, being who you are, being the real you, and that's a very positive step. Now, when we started this series, we highlighted that there are issues and challenges with that way of thinking, and it can often bring to an excessive individualism that can lead into conflict, tension, irrationality, and all sorts of things that actually cause an awful lot of problems. But we're leaving all that to one side because we want to actually recognize that the quest to discover the real you is actually a good thing to do. We want to understand who we really are. But the problem today is that everybody's looking for the answer in the wrong place, because what we're trying to emphasize in this series is that the only place that you will find the answer to who we really are is in the Bible. The Bible teaches us about our true identity, but that identity is not an individualistic identity. It's a collective identity. The Bible teaches us about the real us that we all share in together. And so we've been looking at this together. Originally, this was my plan. We were going to do six parts, looking at the creation of humanity, and then we were going to work at six Sunday evenings. But my plans have kind of fallen apart because of my own incompetence. Part two was too long, so we ended up doing two parts, looking at the nature of humanity. So this is our fourth week, but we're actually just coming into part three, where we're going to look at the purpose of humanity. And then we're going to look at humanity as the image of God, humanity as male and female, humanity as a blessed covenant creature. That's the general direction that we're going in, but it's not going to be six parts. But we're still, we'll get there together. As I said, we started looking at the creation of humanity. We looked at all the beautiful teaching that the Bible gives about how God created us. And one of the big emphases is that he's created us to be the climax of creation.

There's just this beautiful emphasis on the fact that humanity occupies a precious and particular place in creation. We then looked over a couple of weeks at the nature of humanity, and in that we looked at Psalm 8, where David asks the question, what is man? And in answering that question, we thought about how the Bible teaches us that we are created people, created by God, so we're dependent on him, but we're people endowed with opportunities and abilities and responsibilities before him. And as those created people, we are unique and united. And we looked at that in more detail over the past couple of weeks. This week, we're coming to look at the purpose of humanity. And I'm afraid, again, I'm going to have to split it in two. So you're only getting half a sermon tonight. I'm never going to get through this in one night. So we're going to do it this week and next week. My six-part series has now become an eight-part series. It's probably going to be a 12-part series by the time we're done.

[ 4 : 1 2 ] But anyway, we'll just work through it together. When we were looking at the nature of humanity, we were saying that, you know, well, you're looking in the mirror and you're asking the question, what am I? That's what we were looking at when we thought about the nature of humanity.

Now, tonight, we're standing in front of the mirror again, but this time we're asking, what am I for? What's our purpose? And so we're going to think about that tonight and next week.

I want to start by asking you to think back to when you were a child. How would you finish, how would you have finished this sentence? When I grow up, I want to be a... What would you have said?

For me, depending on when you asked me, at some point, I think I would have said football player. I went through a phase of wanting to be a farmer. And I also went through a phase of wanting to be in a rock band. And actually, this year, I've just realised, like, this year, I was playing football. So I'm resurrecting that dream. Next year, I'll buy a tractor. Two years' time. Hitting the stage. No, definitely not.

Answering that question, what do you want to be when you grow up? That's kind of often where our society tends to go when we think about purpose. And we kind of merge ideas of purpose with our role and our achievement in life. So, you know, often that's just related to our job. Because, you know, footballer, rock band, whatever it might be, movie stars, these aren't actually just jobs, but they're kind of like these pinnacle jobs, these dream jobs. And if you get that, then, you know, you're really reaching the high point of human purpose. And tied into that is the kind of human heart's desire for fame, for wealth, for power, for admiration. If these things happen, then our dreams come through.

[ 6 : 13 ] The people who get these things, they're the ones who've reached the pinnacle of human purpose. And the rest of us, and the vast majority of us, well, we've just not made it in quite the same way as these people. That's how many people will think about purpose today. The Bible approaches the question of purpose for humanity in a very different way.

The Bible's teaching is summed up in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Now, the Shorter Catechism, some of you might have learned it when you were wee, it's just a list of questions and answers that give summaries of key truths that Christians believe. And I'm just going to, I've gone too far, I've made a mistake here. I think I'm looking at my wrong, am I looking at the right thing? Hold on.

I've sent the wrong slides to myself. I just need to check this. Hold on a second. I think I've sent myself the wrong thing. I've got the wrong slides up on the screen. But anyway, let's just stick with this just now. Hold on a moment. There we go. That's the verse we want.

I had more slides. I don't know what I've done with them. They're somewhere on my computer at home. Westminster Shorter Catechism asks the question, what's the chief end of man? Which is another way of saying, what's the purpose of man? And the answer is, man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. That's our great purpose. To glorify and enjoy God forever.

And that emphasis comes from the Bible's teaching, including Psalm 73. And these verses that are on the screen before you are speaking to you about how ultimately it's in God that we find our satisfaction.

[ 8 : 12 ] It's in God that we find our purpose. It's in God where all our desires and longings are fulfilled.

And it's interesting because in Psalm 73, as we read through it, you'll see that the first part of the Psalm was actually expressing a whole ton of frustration. Because the Psalmist was looking at people who seemed to have no interest in God at all in their lives. And he was like, they're getting on great. They're strong. They're fat. Now, in those days, fat wasn't an insult like it is today.

Fat was a demonstration of wealth and prosperity and success. It's like, they're doing great. They've got no word of God and everything seems to be going fine with them. And the Psalmist is so frustrated because he's saying, why am I doing what I'm doing? He says in verse 13, in vain, I've kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. In other words, he's saying, I've tried to be what I'm supposed to be for God. And yet everybody else seems to be succeeding, even though they're ignoring him. But as the Psalmist goes on, the tension unravels. And there's the realization that the wealth and success and power that people ignoring God, who ignore God, are enjoying is only ever for a moment. And in many ways, that Psalm is teaching us that the pinnacle of what a godless world can offer us is only ever for a moment. And that's when we discover that if we are grounding our purpose in wealth and in prestige and in success and in power, then ultimately we're chasing something that's going to go. We might have it for a moment, but it will quickly fade.

And in contrast to that, we find our purpose in the God who made us, the God who sustains us, the God who is the strength of our heart and our portion forever.

And connected to that is the words that we read at the start of our service and our call to worship, when Jesus prayed for his disciples and for all who were going to come to follow him.

[ 10 : 45 ] And he prayed these words, In other words, at the center of what Jesus is saying there is that his great prayer for us is that we would know God, that we would know the reality of a relationship with him, that we would know his extraordinary love towards us through his son.

So the big goal in terms of summarizing our purpose is that we are to glorify and enjoy God forever. Whatever. And what exactly does that mean? What's all that talking about?

Well, I think one of the first things that we want to recognize is that when we are told that our purpose is to glorify God, it is emphasizing that humanity is called to a high purpose.

We are called to an incredibly high purpose. And this is tying in with what we've learned as we've looked at the creation of humanity and the nature of humanity.

[ 12 : 49 ] One of the things that we've seen when we've looked at Genesis 1 and 2 is that humanity is in a category all of its own. And so you see the world that's being made by God and you see that it's all building up to the great focal point of the creation of humanity.

Humanity belongs in a category of its own. And the Bible tells you that, but the world around us tells us that as well. You see that so clearly when we look at the developments across world history. You see the dynamics of society and culture all across the world. Humanity can do stuff that no other part of creation can do. Humanity advances in the ways that no other part of humanity advances.

And you see all the developments of culture and technology and everything. It's only us that does it. I often use the illustration of sheep, but sheep never look at the sunset.

And sheep never, they never, they never, they never change their grass into Michelin star grass.

[ 13 : 51 ] They never advance their food in any way. They just do their thing over and over again. And you see that repeated all across the world around us. Humanity though, humanity is in a different category.

A unique set of gifts, a unique set of opportunities, a unique set of privileges. And all of that's reminding us that we have those gifts, we have those opportunities, we have those privileges, because our calling is a high calling.

Our purpose is a high purpose. We're made to glorify God. And so, yes, in a way, the whole creation makes music to God as the waves roar, as the leaves flutter, as the wind blows, creation is making its noise of praise.

But we sing, we make music, and we can bring that chorus of praise to God to an entirely new level because of the gifts that we have.

And that gives us an extraordinary opportunity to bring glory to God in every single part of our lives. And that's something that I think is very, very important to remember and something that's very easy to misunderstand.

[ 15 : 18 ] Sometimes we think that to follow Jesus and to be a Christian is almost to detach from the world and that our purpose is ultimately only in heaven and just now we need to kind of avoid people, cut ourselves off, and keep our distance.

But that was never the purpose for which we were made. It was never the intention that God has for us. His intention is not for us to cut ourselves off from the world around us, nor is it His intention for us to freeze in terms of our technological advancement or anything like that.

Instead, God has made us to be involved, God has made us to advance, and in all of these areas there's the opportunity to glorify Him.

And this makes perfect sense because if you look at every single gift that humanity has, whether it's gifts in mathematics, whether it's gifts in scientific discovery, whether it's gifts in technology, whether it's gifts in art, music, whatever it may be, all of them, all of them, all of them are an opportunity to bring honor to God.

And that makes perfect sense because those gifts came from Him and it's only because of Him that we have them. And so humanity is set in this unique category where we have this unique giftedness and we're able to use all of these gifts as an opportunity to glorify Him.

[ 16 : 51 ] Now, the big tragedy of human history is that we've not done that. And instead, we've used those gifts to push God away. And frequently, we've actually felt that we know better ourselves, we can do things our way, and the gifts that we've been given to glorify Him, we've often used to try and glorify ourselves.

And you see that this tension exists in human experience. We're set in this unique category. You can see this so clearly. We have all these gifts whereby we can honor and glorify God.

And yet, so often, we've not done that. And instead, you see human history full of people whose great desire is to glorify themselves.

And one of the things that we often see in society now that's interesting is that so many of the most influential forces in our society are geared towards glorifying people.

And so you see that in our celebrity culture. Celebrities are set up. You see that in the whole idea of people who are influencers, people who have a big presence on social media.

[18:18] It can apply in sport. It can apply in the art world. And there's this huge gravitation where hundreds, thousands, sometimes millions of people are pouring their energy into glorifying people.

Now, at one small level, those people are gifted and they're making a contribution and not everything about that is bad. But what I want us to see is that if we are, if humanity is pouring all its energy and passion into glorifying a person, we are misplacing our glory.

And there's two reasons why that's so important to recognize. If you're pouring all your, if you're pouring all your glory into, you know, celebrity, influencer, sports star, whatever it might be, there's two massive things wrong with it.

One is they don't deserve that glory one bit more than you do. They are nothing more than what you are.

And it's, it's actually really quite bizarre for us to, to, to, to make the object of our adoration a fellow human. Because it's just a guy.

[19:55] It's just a girl. They're nothing more than what you are. So that's, that's one reason why that glory is misplaced. But the other reason why that kind of glory is misplaced is because, it's because the, the one who actually is worthy of our worship is not them.

It's God. God's the one who deserves our worship. God's the one who's given us every gift that we have.

God's the one who has, who has placed all these gifts and opportunities in our lives. And we want to give him, we want to give him the glory that he deserves.

That's why the psalmist can speak in these terms that, that ultimately say, who have I in heaven but you? There's nothing on earth that I desire besides you. He's realizing that only God is God.

And he's the one who's worthy of our glory. And so, because God's the one who's worthy of our glory, we want every part of our lives to contribute towards that. And that's a vitally important part of how we live out our lives week to week as Christians.

[21:12] Do we seek to glorify God as we come together on a Sunday to worship? Absolutely. But we also seek to glorify him when we go to work on Monday morning, when we go to school, when we step into our communities, when we come home, when we interact with our families and with our friends.

We want every single part of our lives to glorify God, to be lived in a way that pleases him, that honors him, that recognizes that he alone is God and that he is so, so good.

And you might say, well, how do you do that? Well, Jesus has made it so beautifully simple because he said, look, there's no greater two commandments than to love God and to love one another. That's what he spoke about in his prayer in John 17, that as we know and experience the extraordinary love that God has shown towards us, we are to show and extend that love to one another as we live out our lives.

We have a high calling. You have a high calling this week. You have a high purpose to glorify God. And that's so important because this week might feel like it's going to be really boring. It might feel like it's going to be really normal. It might be a week that you're dreading.

[22:45] But whatever you're doing this week, it's an opportunity for us to live out our lives without eyes on Jesus, following the purpose that he has given us.

recognizing the high calling that he's placed on your life. That phrase, glorifying God forever, is so important because if you don't recognize that that's your purpose, if you don't recognize that your purpose is to glorify God forever, if you don't recognize that, you're selling yourself short.

You're selling yourself short. if glorifying God is not what we're going to do this week, what are we going to do?

What is our purpose? Is it just to do well in school? Is it just to earn a little bit more money? Is it just to make sure that I finally get my mortgage paid off? Is it just to make sure I can make it to

retirement?

Is it just to get to the next holiday? Is it just to be a nice person? They're all good things. They're all great things. You're made for even greater. You are made for even greater. And you know, that should do two things to you.

[ 23 : 59 ] That should inspire you. But it should also, it should also be the greatest words of reassurance that you have ever heard if you struggle with your sense of self-worth.

So many of us do. So many of us feel everybody else is doing great, I'm doing awful. Everybody else is strong, I'm struggling. Everybody else knows what they're doing, I don't have a clue.

But you were made to be a God glorifier. That's what he made you to be. That's what he's gifted you to be.

That's what he's called you to be. And as we follow him, that's exactly what you can be. And that is such, such an exciting role for us to have.

But that's only half of what the catechism says. It says, we are to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

[ 25 : 04 ] Now I think there's a beautiful balance there. There's loads of wonderful things. I love that that word has been chosen. The Shorter Catechism was written 400 years ago, nearly 400 years ago.

And people, you know, will tend to think of the writers of that. It was written, that's what's called the Westminster Assembly, if I give you just a wee history lesson, 1640s, a gathering of, oh, I've forgotten, maybe 200 theologians.

I can't remember the numbers. It's about that. And they spent several years writing some key documents to summarize what they think the Bible says. And in many ways, that era of history is associated with, you know, very conservative, and some people would say very rigid forms of Christianity.

And some people are quite dismissive of these documents. They think it's old-fashioned. They think it's stiff. They think it's dull. And yet, you see that the very first thing that they want us to see is that our purpose is to glorify and enjoy God forever.

And the balance in those two words is wonderful because glorifying God is something that we do towards Him, isn't it? Now, we never do that perfectly. It's always inadequate. But we glorify God from us to Him as we seek to serve Him, as our lives are lived before Him, striving to honor Him in all that we do.

[ 26 : 28 ] But enjoying God is from Him to us. Enjoying God is speaking of the fact that the Christian faith is never actually about us working our way up to Him to make sure that we maybe glorify Him enough and we're maybe good enough and we can maybe reach a certain standard that will satisfy.

That's never what the gospel is about. The gospel is grounded in the grace of God which is always from God to us pouring out His love upon us so that we can enjoy that love forever.

I don't know what you think, what your kind of first impression is when you think about Christianity, when you think about being in church, when you think about what it means to follow Jesus.

I don't know what the first word that comes into your minds is. And certainly, people who look at us from a distance, they often think it's kind of restrictive, heavy, doom and gloom, all of that kind of stuff.

It's just so wonderful to be able to say that that's just not true. That actually, to follow Jesus and to know Jesus is to step onto the path of enjoying God forever.

[ 27 : 56 ] Now, that doesn't mean that every aspect of following Jesus is easy. There are many struggles and difficulties that we face as we follow Him.

But we are being brought, in these words, we are being brought back to the fact that at the heart of God's purpose for you is not simply that you would do something for Him.

Really, it's that He would do so much for you. This is crucial for understanding the Christian faith.

The Christian faith is grounded on the concept of love.

That's what it's all grounded on. And at the heart of that is the essential nature of God Himself who we would say, as the Bible says, that God is love.

And at the heart of that is God as Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is love. And the creation of humanity and God calling His people, God building His church is all grounded on love.

[ 29 : 00 ] But, crucial thing to recognize is this. The key point is not that we are made to give God more love. We are not made to give God more love as though there wasn't enough love in God.

And there's this kind of gap in the love between Father, Son, and Spirit that we need to fill. That is not how it works at all. It's the complete opposite. The whole reason we exist, the whole reason God created us, the whole reason He's calling us and saving us is because His love is so great, it's overflowing to us.

His love is so great, so perfect, so big, it is an overflow of that love into us that lies at the heart of God's purpose in creating us.

And that's captured by that phrase, enjoying God forever. enjoying the gifts that He gives us, enjoying the opportunities that we have in our lives, and most of all, enjoying the incredible privilege of knowing Him.

Him. And this is so important for us to remember because so often when we go through our lives as Christians, we kind of feel like we're always just stuffing up, really, is how we often feel.

[ 30 : 42 ] We feel like we're always stumbling, always making mistakes, always getting things wrong, and we often think that really it's like God is just about tolerating us because I haven't prayed enough, I struggle to listen when I'm at church, I got frustrated at work, I'm jealous of someone at school, or whatever it might be, and we think that in all these mistakes and in all these struggles that God is just about tolerating us, and just about putting up with us, that's how I often feel it's so easy to think like that, it's a completely wrong understanding of how God views us because God is saying to you as you go into a new week tomorrow, God is saying tomorrow morning, he is saying this is not about me tolerating you, he's saying I want this to be about you enjoying me, I want this week,

God is saying I want this week to be about you enjoying me, enjoying me as the strength of your heart, enjoying me as your portion, in other words as the one who gives you deep satisfaction, who quenches the thirsts, the deepest thirsts of your heart, enjoying his encouragement, his strength, his peace, his wisdom, his protection, his patience, his compassion, his tenderness, and his unending love.

We have a high calling, as God calls us to glorify him, but we also have an incredible privilege where he invites us to enjoy him forever.

love. And that last word really is the crucial one, because all of this is not about finding a good piece of advice to help you through life or to give you a sense of purpose for the future years that you're going to live.

love. It's not really about the next few years at all. It's about eternity. It's about forever.

[ 33 : 17 ] And, you know, we're talking about our purpose. What we have to recognize is that that's actually tied to God's purposes.

it's what he wants that ultimately matters. And he wants you with him forever. That's why he sent Jesus.

That's why Jesus died and rose again, so that all who trust in him can know him, can be with him, can glorify and enjoy him forever.

God. As we think about our purpose, there are many competing voices trying to offer you purpose, maybe some almost trying to exploit the sense of purpose that you may have.

But the competing voices in the world around us are absolutely nothing compared to the call of the gospel. To glorify God and to enjoy him and the fullness of his love forever.

[ 34 : 29 ] There's no better purpose than that. Amen. Let's pray.