

YOUR STORY GOD'S GLORY

PURSUING THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

RIVER OAKS | TIMBERGROVE | ONLINE

January 3, 2021

Your Story | God's Glory: Finding Purpose in Your Place

On a scale of 1-to-5, how certain are you that your life has real purpose? (Circle one)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|------------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| I'm pretty sure life's an accident | Life means whatever ever you want it to be | There must be some reason for life, right? | I think I'm here for a reason | Yeah I know my life's purpose |

Can you explain a bit about why you answered the way that you did? *Personal - but their answers to this question might provide some great conversation starters!*

INTRO: Your Story | God's Glory: Pursuing the Purpose of Life

Welcome to our new season of Story Groups based on our message series called "Your Story | God's Glory"! Starting this week, we're going to spend a month learning about the purpose of life according to the Bible. Whether you're someone who loves the Bible or you consider yourself a skeptic, or any combination of the two, I'm really glad you're here, and I'm looking forward to this month-long journey of learning more about life's purpose with my Story family!

Love, Pastor Eric

This week we'll learn about finding PURPOSE in your PLACE.

Colossians 1:15-16 *The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.*

What does this passage reveal about Jesus ("the Son"), especially regarding his power and place over all of creation? *He existed before all things. He was not created. "The Word was with God, and he was God." (John 1:1-14) Jesus didn't just enter into creation; he created it and is the Lord over it.*

Paying special attention to the last phrase in this passage - *all things have been created through him and for him* - what can we learn about the purpose of all created things? *The idea that all things were created through him may come as no surprise to us, but the notion that all things have been created for him implies purpose. Everything that is, exists for God - including us.*

Based on this passage, how should we describe our *place* in the world, especially in relation to God? *Our place is secondary to God's place. He is the center of the universe, not us.*

Finding PURPOSE in your PLACE means embracing your life's mission:

You exist to WORSHIP, SERVE, and LOVE!

YOUR STORY GOD'S GLORY

PURSUING THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

1. You exist to **WORSHIP**.

Romans 12:1-2 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

What is worship? *Worship is the act of offering yourself completely to God.*

What does the act of *surrender* have to do with worshiping God? *Surrendering your whole self to God is your heart's most natural response to his amazing grace.*

2. You exist to **SERVE**.

Romans 12:3-8 *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*

What is service? *Service is the act of doing God's will using the gifts He gave you.*

Make a list of the different gifts the Apostle Paul listed in this passage along with a modern-day example of what it might look like to put each gift to use (example: "Teaching: serving with The Story's Student Ministries to teach young people about the Bible"). *Personal.*

3. You exist to **LOVE**.

Romans 12:9-12 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.*

In the context of this passage, what is love? *Love is the act of fully embracing the heart of God, including His Word, His will, and His ways.*

What does how we treat each other say about how much we love God? (John 15:9-17 & 1 John 4:7-11) *It is impossible to love God and to go on hating one another. On the contrary, when we love people who don't love us back, we bear witness to the love of God.*

Why might it be so important for us to learn how to love God and each other during our time on earth? (1 Corinthians 13:13) *Unlike some of the feelings and emotions we experience in this life, love (along with faith and hope) will remain in eternity. The tests we face in this life can teach us how to recognize and receive God's love for us, and as we extend that love to others, we are preparing our hearts for heaven.*

YOUR STORY GOD'S GLORY

PURSUING THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

RIVER OAKS | TIMBERGROVE | ONLINE

January 10, 2021

Your Story | God's Glory: Finding Purpose in Your Pain

INTRO: Your Story | God's Glory: Pursuing the Purpose of Life

This January, we're learning about the purpose of life according to the Bible. Whether you're someone who loves the Bible or you consider yourself a skeptic, or any combination of the two, I'm really glad you're here, and I'm looking forward to this month-long journey of learning more about life's purpose with my Story family! Love, Pastor Eric

Think about a time in your life when you felt very close to God (or closer than you feel now). What were the circumstances going on around you that may have contributed to how close you felt to God?

Personal

In your experience, what role do pain and suffering play in opening us up to experiencing God's presence?

Personal

This week we're learning about finding PURPOSE in your PAIN. First, let's revisit the foundational Bible passage for this series:

Colossians 1:15-16 *The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.*

Based on what you know about Jesus, a.k.a. "The Son," how could he possibly relate to our pain and suffering?

Personal, but leaders should be prepared to remind their groups of Christ's suffering and sacrifice.

If we have been created through Christ and for Christ, how should that affect the way we view seasons of suffering?

*Seasons of suffering are **opportunities** to grow closer to Christ.*

If you watched or listened to Pastor Eric's message with Greg Kelley, write down any takeaways, ideas, or questions that stood out to you:

Personal

YOUR STORY GOD'S GLORY

PURSUING THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

Let's take a closer look at a passage from the Bible that teaches us how to deal with pain:

Romans 8:28 We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

This passage is often taken to mean that, once you're a Christian, God watches your back and bad things won't happen to you. Obviously, that's not what this passage says. As Greg Kelley and Pastor Eric discussed in this week's sermon, Jesus told his disciples, "In this life you will have trouble, but take heart, for I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

So, what *does* Romans 8:28 mean? Let's break it down one phrase at a time:

- **We know...** How do we *know*? Based on what experience or truth can we claim to *know* something about God?
The Bible. The promises of Jesus. The witness of Christians throughout the years. Our experiences of God in Christian community. Our personal experiences with God are also a form of knowledge.
- **...that God causes...** If God is God, then He must be the First Cause of the universe, right? Even when it doesn't feel that way, there is a greater plan and purpose for the universe, and for you. If we really believed that to be the case, how would it change the way we experience seasons of pain and hardship?
We would walk through trials with more trust and confidence in God
- **...everything to work together...** The events of your life aren't random or meaningless, but each season is part of a greater story God is telling through your life. How would you describe the "season" that you are in right now, and how do you think this particular season might be part of God's greater story?
Personal
- **...for the good of those who love God...** When we struggle, it's important to remember that God is in the GOOD business. Time and time again in Scripture, God entered into a situation that seems hopeless, and He made something good come out of it. Can you remember a time in your life when everything seemed dark and all hope seemed lost, but somehow God walked you through it?
Personal
- **...and are called according to his purpose...** There's that word again: purpose. We believe we were made through Christ...*for Christ*. Everything that God allows to happen in your life is ultimately to make you more like Christ. How has the pain of your past shaped you to live and love more like Christ?
Personal, but leaders should be prepared to help group members who are stuck on this question to think more deeply about how pain has shaped them - for example, maybe it's made them more empathetic and merciful toward others, or maybe it's given them more strength and perseverance, etc.

YOUR STORY GOD'S GLORY

PURSUING THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

RIVER OAKS | TIMBERGROVE | ONLINE

January 17, 2021

Your Story | God's Glory: Finding Purpose in Your Passion

INTRO: Your Story | God's Glory: Pursuing the Purpose of Life

This January, we're learning about the purpose of life according to the Bible. Whether you're someone who loves the Bible or you consider yourself a skeptic, or any combination of the two, I'm really glad you're here, and I'm looking forward to this month-long journey of learning more about life's purpose with my Story family! Love, Pastor Eric

Complete the following sentence (feel free to write multiple answers!): *I feel like I'm most alive when I am...*

(Personal)

What, specifically, is it about that activity or habit makes you feel alive?

(Personal, but group leaders should push members to be as specific as possible. For example, if someone feels most alive when fishing, what is it about fishing that brings them to life? Nature? Peace and quiet? Providing fresh food for their family? Time with friends?)

This week we're learning about finding PURPOSE in your PASSION. The primary Bible passage for this week is found in the New Testament book called Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 10:

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

If you look for it, you'll find a running theme throughout the Bible: God designed you for a specific purpose. Like an architect or a programmer, God built you - your character, your personality, your strengths, and your ambitions - to His exact specifications (Psalm 139:13-14, Romans 12:6, Jeremiah 1:5). **If God hardwired you to feel alive when doing the things you listed above, what might that say about your life's bigger purpose?**

Somewhat personal, but the point here should be that there is an intentional connection between the things we're most passionate about and the purpose of our lives.

Your _____ **PASSIONS** point toward your _____ **PURPOSE!**

(But be careful! Sometimes our _____ **PASSIONS** become _____ **DISTRACTIONS!**)

Biblically speaking, a true *passion* is: *Given by God, centered on God, and glorifying to God*

A mere distraction, on the other hand, is: *Given by the world, centered on self, and glorifying to no one.*

YOUR STORY GOD'S GLORY

PURSUING THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

How can we know whether something that makes us feel alive is a God-given passion or a meaningless distraction?

1. Look to the ____ WORD.

Ask: Does this activity/habit/person/thing conform to the Word of God?

2. Search your ____ HEART.

Ask: When it comes to the investment of my time, money, and attention, is it well with my soul? When I stand before the Lord to give a full account of my life (2 Corinthians 5:10), will I be proud or ashamed of my investment in this passion?

3. Examine the ____ FRUIT.

Ask: What is my return on this investment? Have the seeds I've been planting yielded fruit that is pleasing to God (Matthew 7:17-20)?

List a few examples of God-given passions that you have experienced in your own life, or that you have witnessed in the lives of others.

Personal

Now list a few examples of distractions that may look and feel like passions but are probably not of God:

Personal

Love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your ____ HEART.

Deuteronomy 11:13

How do your passions point toward your life's purpose? In other words, how might the things that make you feel *alive* be indicative of God's will for your life?

Somewhat personal, but group leaders should be prepared to help group members understand the connections between our distractions and our true, God-given passions. Example: a guy who spends hours every day playing Call of Duty or NBA2K with friends online isn't really passionate about video games. He's passionate about sharing his life with friends and being on some kind of mission together.

Name one or two simple things you can do this week to begin transforming your mere distractions into purposeful passions that bring God glory?

Somewhat personal, but let's push group members to get specific about reining in the time and money we're wasting on distractions and setting our sights on the true, underlying passions God gave us in our hearts.

YOUR STORY GOD'S GLORY

PURSUING THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

RIVER OAKS | TIMBERGROVE | ONLINE

January 24, 2021

Your Story | God's Glory: Finding Purpose in Your Power

INTRO: Your Story | God's Glory: Pursuing the Purpose of Life

This January, we're learning about the purpose of life according to the Bible. Whether you're someone who loves the Bible or you consider yourself a skeptic, or any combination of the two, I'm really glad you're here, and I'm really enjoying this month-long journey of learning more about life's purpose with my Story family! Love, Pastor Eric

Think about the last time you really served someone, out of the goodness of your heart, with no strings attached. What did you do for them? What did it mean to them? And to you?

Personal. Leaders should challenge themselves and their group members to explore the gift of selfless service. Even when it hurts, the opportunity to be a living sacrifice reveals the heart of Christ in us.

Jesus once said to his followers, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as **the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...**" (Matthew 20:26-28). **What are the implications of this for followers of Jesus today?**

That our purpose is wrapped up in selfless service to God and others.

You were CREATED to CONTRIBUTE!

This week we're learning about finding PURPOSE in your POWER. Here's our primary Bible passage for this week's message:

2 Timothy 1:7-9 For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.

According to this passage, what is God's purpose for our lives?

To be saved by the grace of God, and to live holy lives by the power of God

Paul uses the word "power" twice in this passage. Where does this power come from?

The Holy Spirit.

God CALLS all BELIEVERS into MINISTRY.

YOUR STORY GOD'S GLORY

PURSUING THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

1 Corinthians 6:17-20 But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit... Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Excuses, excuses. On your own, read **Luke 14:18-35**. What excuses do the people in this story use to avoid making an appearance at the man's party? *"I need to see some land I bought." "I'm on my way to see my new livestock." "I just got married, so I can't come."*

When it comes to serving God and our neighbors, we've all come up with excuses from time to time to avoid doing the work. So let's be honest: what are some of your go-to excuses?

Personal, but leaders should come prepared to get real and vulnerable by sharing their own go-to excuses

When we decide to stop making excuses, and to receive the power of God through the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to serve God and our neighbors in a variety of ways:

- **ATTITUDE**

How can a godly attitude be a manifestation of God's power in your daily life?

Personal, but see Philippians 4:8 for inspiration

List some of the reasons why you sometimes choose to have an ungodly attitude. What can you do to claim a more godly perspective, even when the circumstances around you are less than ideal? *Personal, but let's get real with each other about the circumstances, people, or toxic thought patterns that often hold us back*

- **ABILITY**

List some of the *abilities* - physical, spiritual, social, or financial - that God has given you:

Personal, but the point here is that God has given every believer some kind of ability, or the power to get things done in accordance with His will.

Which of these abilities have you already used to serve God and the world around you?

And which of these abilities have you kept under wraps? *Personal. It's important that we're open with each other about the abilities we've kept under wraps. See Romans 12:6-8 for some inspiration.*

- **AVAILABILITY**

Has someone ever been *available* to you in ways that demonstrated God's power in your life? Who was it, and how was their availability a gift to you? *Personal*

How can you choose to be more available to God and to the people in your life?

Personal, but group leaders should challenge themselves and others to be honest about the sacrifices that are required of us when we choose to be available.

As you think about some of the specific ways in which God has empowered you to serve Him and the world around you, what are you learning about your life's purpose?

Personal. Hopefully we can guide people to see that their true purpose is grounded in God.

What old habits or thought-patterns need to change so you can live your God-given purpose?

Personal.

YOUR STORY GOD'S GLORY

PURSUING THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

RIVER OAKS | TIMBERGROVE | ONLINE

January 31, 2021

Your Story | God's Glory: Finding Purpose with People

INTRO: Your Story | God's Glory: Pursuing the Purpose of Life

This January, we're learning about the purpose of life according to the Bible. Whether you're someone who loves the Bible or you consider yourself a skeptic, or any combination of the two, I'm really glad you're here, and I'm really enjoying this month-long journey of learning more about life's purpose with my Story family! Love, Pastor Geo

Think about the last time you shared the gospel with someone - what was the context? How did you share it, and was it effective? (If you've never shared the gospel with anyone, can you think of a time someone shared the gospel with you?)

Personal

Understanding Jesus' mission is essential as we seek to fulfill our purpose within the body of Christ. What are some of the ways in which Christians can miscommunicate or overcomplicate the simplicity of Jesus' mission? How might this affect new believers who want to follow him? **We tend to turn Jesus into a social justice warrior instead of a loving savior who died to redeem us from our sins. The chart below shows some of the new ideas that are common among younger believers. But think of other ways in which we miscommunicate or misconstrued the truth of the gospel with your groups.**

| <u>Historic Christianity:</u> | <u>Contemporary Critical Theory:</u> |
|---|---|
| 1. We are human beings made in the image of a holy, loving, and just God. | 1. Our identity is not found in who we are created to be, but in how we relate with other groups as defined by our class, gender, sexual preference, and so on. |
| 2. Sin against a holy God is what's wrong with the world. | 2. Oppression is what's wrong |
| 3. The sin problem is fixed by Jesus taking punishment for our sins upon himself, dying the death we deserve, so we could be reconciled to God. | 3. The problem of oppression is fixed by activism, raising awareness, and the overthrow of oppressive systems and their power. |
| 4. The meaning of life: To glorify God | 4. The meaning of life: To free groups from oppression. |

YOUR STORY GOD'S GLORY

PURSuing THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 How does this passage inform us of the mission Jesus came to accomplish during this time on earth?

The mission that Jesus came to accomplish has everything to do with redeeming us. When we profess a savior who is not concerned about redeeming us from sin, we corrupt the gospel. However, when we confess with our lips that Jesus Christ is our savior and share our own powerful story of redemption, lives are transformed.

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus gave us very specific instructions on what we're called to do: *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20* How does this passage inform us of our mission and purpose within the body of Christ?

We tend to think that this is the purpose given to pastors or church staff, but it is something we're all called to do. When we over complicate the mission of the church, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the church exists to attract members, or to make budget, or to have the pastor with the skinniest skinny jeans and the tallest faux hawk haha...but the Church's purpose is wrapped up in Christ. And if He gave us a very clear commandment in Matthew.

What key role do each of us play in making this mission a reality?

We follow Jesus' example by sharing the message ONE PERSON at a time

What key component do we need in order to effectively share the gospel with others?

A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP with Jesus

Do you know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, and are you able to articulate the change that you have experienced since you surrendered your life to him?

Personal

What are some of the things you can actively do, or new practices or disciplines you can start, in order to accomplish your purpose within the body of Christ?

-Make sure your foundation is right. Are you worshipping the God of scripture and His son Jesus? Set your own agendas behind and let God do the work through you.

-Strengthen your relationship with Jesus by studying the bible, be prepared for the times when God will give you the opportunity to share your story with others.

-Share about Jesus one person at a time. It doesn't have to be formal, it needs to be authentic, and it needs to keep Jesus at the center.