

**EMBRACING THE VISION: THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE**  
**God's Vision For The Rest of Your Life**  
**Part 1**  
**Easter 2005**  
**Rick Warren**

*"It is in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for... part of the overall purpose He is working out in everything and everyone." Eph. 1:11 (Mes)*

*"Everything, absolutely everything... got started in Him and finds its purpose in Him." Col. 1:16 (Mes)*

**1. GOD PLANNED ME FOR HIS PLEASURE**

*"You God created everything, and it is for Your pleasure that they exist and were created!" Rev. 4:11b (NLT)*

*"The Lord takes pleasure in His people." Psalm 149:4 (GN)*

*"Long before He laid down earth's foundations, God had us in mind, and settled on us as the focus of His love." Eph. 1:4 (Mes)*

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment." Matt. 22:37-38 (NIV)*

*"I don't want your sacrifices – I want your love! I don't want your offerings – I want you to know Me!" Hosea 6:6 (LB)*

**THE 1<sup>st</sup> PURPOSE OF LIFE IS: TO KNOW AND LOVE GOD**

*"Some people have missed the most important thing in life – they don't know God." 1 Tim. 6:21 (LB)*

*"People who don't know God are always worrying." Matt. 6:32a (CEV)*

**2. GOD FORMED ME FOR HIS FAMILY**

*"God's unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave Him great pleasure." Eph. 1:5 (NLT)*

*"God has given us the privilege of being born again so that we are now members of God's own family." 1 Pet. 1:3 (LB)*

*"That family is the church of the living God, the support and foundation of the truth." 1 Tim. 3:15 (NCV)*

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*"Love your spiritual family."* 1 Peter 2:17 (Mes)

**THE 2<sup>nd</sup> PURPOSE OF LIFE IS: TO LEARN TO LOVE OTHERS**

*"We belong to each other and each of us needs all the others."* Rom. 12:5 (NLT)

**3. GOD CREATED ME TO BECOME LIKE CHRIST**

*"From the very beginning God decided that those who came to Him--and all along He knew who would--should become like His Son."* Rom. 8:29 (LB)

*"We look at the Son and see God's original purpose in everything created."* Col 1:15 (Mes)

*"In your lives you must think and act like Christ Jesus."* Phil. 2:5 (NCV)

*"As the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like Him."*  
2 Cor. 3:18b (NLT)

**THE 3<sup>rd</sup> PURPOSE OF LIFE IS: TO GROW UP SPIRITUALLY**

*"Some people have such shallow soil of character that when their emotions wear off and difficulty arrives, there's nothing to show for it."* Mark 4:17 (Mes)

**4. GOD "SHAPED" ME TO SERVE HIM**

*"You shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother's womb."*  
Ps. 139:13 (Mes)

Spiritual Gifts  
Heart  
Abilities  
Personality  
Experiences

*"God made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us to do good works, which He planned in advance for us to live our lives doing." Eph. 2:10 (NCV)*

*"God has given each of you some special abilities; be sure to use them to help each other, passing on to others God's many kinds of blessings."* 1 Peter 4:10 (LB)

**THE 4<sup>th</sup> PURPOSE OF LIFE IS: TO SERVE GOD BY SERVING OTHERS**

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#### **5. GOD MADE ME FOR A MISSION**

*Jesus: "In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world." John 17:18 (Mes)*

*"Where there is no vision, the people perish." Pr. 29:18 (KJV)*

Part 2 Expecting the Vision (next weekend)

Part 3 Enjoying the Vision (Apr. 9-10)

Part 4 Expanding the Vision (Apr. 17- Angel Stadium)

Part 5 Energizing the Vision (Apr. 23-24)

*"Those who embrace My ways are most blessed." Pr. 8:32 (Mes)*

*"Jesus included everyone in His death so everyone could be included in His life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own." 2 Cor. 5:15 (Mes)*

*"Open your eyes and see how good God is! Blessed are you who run to Him." Ps. 34:8 (Mes)*

*Jesus: "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me for real rest...and you'll recover your life...and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." Matt. 11:28-30 (Mes)*

*"It makes no difference who you are or where you're from—if you want God and are ready to do as He says, the door is open." Acts 10:35 (Mes)*

#### ***A PRAYER OF PURPOSE***

Dear God, thank You for creating me and loving me. I want to fulfill the purposes that You created me for. So starting today, I really want to get to know and love and trust You. I want my life to bring You pleasure and I want to become a part of Your family. Help me to grow more like Your Son Jesus, and to use my life to follow and serve You. Thank You for sending Jesus to die for me. In the weeks ahead, help me to understand Your vision and mission for the rest of my life.

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Happy Easter, Saddleback! I want to greet all of those in the different venues across our campus, those of you who are outside and in overflow. If you'll take out the little book, "God's Vision for the Rest of Your life." Every verse that we're going to look at today is in this little booklet.

God has never created anything without a purpose. Every plant has a purpose. Every rock has a purpose. Every animal has a purpose. Every planet, every star. If your heart is beating it means God has purpose for your life.

If you want to know the purpose for your life you have to start with God. I realize that in our culture a lot of people say, "You want to know your purpose? Look within." Like, "Trust the Force, Luke." The only problem is, that doesn't work. I tried looking within and I didn't like what I saw. If you could discover your purpose by looking within yourself, we'd all know it by now. It doesn't work.

The truth is, you didn't create you so you can't tell yourself what you were created for. Does that make sense? God says, "I made you and I'm the one who can tell you what your purpose is." If I were to hold up an invention that you'd never seen before and I said, "Tell me the purpose of this invention." You wouldn't know what the purpose of it is. Unless you either, A, talked to the inventor, the creator who made it. Or, B, read the owners manual. The only way you're ever going to know the purpose of your life is either, A, talk with the creator who created you or, B, read the owner's manual.

So today, we're going to look at what God says are the purposes of your life.

On the first page there's a couple verses from the Bible there. The first verse says this, "*It is in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Part of the overall purpose He is working out in everything and everyone.*" God has a global, or universal purpose for the entire universe. He has a cosmic purpose for history. And you are a part of that. Your purpose fits into God's grander scheme.

Notice the next verse. "*Everything, absolutely everything, got started in Him and find its purpose in Him.*" Let me try to summarize it real simply for you. Number one, you were made *by* God and you were made *for* God. Until you understand that life isn't going to make sense.

God created you to last forever. Forever. One day your heart's going to stop. That's going to be the end of your body but that's not going to be the end of you because you were made in God's image and you were made to last forever. Because you're made in God's image.

What that means is this. You're going to spend more time on the other side of death that you do on this side. Here on earth you're going to get 60, 80, at the most 100 years. At the most. That's really not very long considering the fact that you're going to spend trillions and trillions and trillions of years in eternity. You're going to spend far more time on that side of death than you do on this side of death.

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So the question we're asking this morning is, What are earth am I here for? What am I supposed to do with the 60 or the 80 or at the most 100 years I get on this planet in preparation for the life that is in the future.

The Bible says that life is preparation for eternity. If anybody ever asks you what is the meaning of life? Here it is. Life is preparation for eternity. This is the warm up act before the real play begins. This is the dress rehearsal before the real show starts. This is the initial warm up lap around the race before the real race begins. Life on earth is the kindergarten. It's the pre school. It's the get-ready stage for eternity. As I said you're going to spend more on that side of eternity than you do on this side.

In eternity you're going to do a certain number of things. We're going to talk about them this morning. What God wants you to do while you're here on earth is practice. God wants you to practice here on earth what you're going to do forever in eternity.

The Bible says that God has five purposes for your life:

1. God planned me for His pleasure.

Everything in the universe was created so that God could enjoy it. He created it all for His pleasure and for His enjoyment. The Bible says this in the book of Revelation "*You, God, created everything. And it is for Your pleasure that they exist and were created.*" Everything in the universe, including you, was created for God to enjoy. He wanted it so He created it for His enjoyment.

*"The Lord takes pleasure in His people."* How many of you are parents? Do you take pleasure in watching your kids? Most of the time. I think the same thing is true with God. Most of the time God takes pleasure watching you be you. I've got a little eighteen-month-old granddaughter now. Her name is Kaylee. I take pleasure just in watching Kaylee. She doesn't have to do anything special. She can just kind of toddle around the room. I get so much enjoyment just watching her be her. She doesn't have to do anything spiritual, like come up and preach a sermon to me. She doesn't have to quote a Bible verse. She doesn't have to pray. She doesn't have to do anything "holy." I just enjoy her for being her.

Some of you have never understood this. You think that the only time God smiles on you is when you're doing something "spiritual." Like when you're going to church. Or when you help a poor person. Or when you show kindness to somebody. Or when you're reading your Bible. You think that the only time God is happy with you is when you are doing something "spiritual." You don't realize that God gets pleasure out of just watching you be you because He created you.

When my three children were small I used to sneak into their room at night and sit down by the side of their bed and just watch them breathe. Just watch them sleep. I got so much joy! I'd just sit on the edge of their bed, these little kids, and I'd watch their chest rise and fall. Rise and fall, rise and fall. I'd just watch them sleep peacefully and breathe. I got so much pleasure out of that because I was their father. I created them. They were created simply out of my love and I loved them. They didn't have to be doing anything fancy. I just loved them.

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That's the way your heavenly Father is toward you. God looks at you and He loves you simply because He made you.

The Bible says "*Long before He laid down the earth's foundations, God had us in mind and He settled on us as the focus of His love.*" Before God even created the universe He thought of you. And He focused on you. The Bible says that the entire universe was created simply so He could create the human race so He could love us. We are the focus of His love unlike anything else in creation. Not like animals or angels or stars or anything else. We were created to be loved by God.

This is very important – get this. The Bible says that "*God is love.*" It doesn't say He has love. It says He is love. It is the essence of His character. It is the nature of His being. God is love. I could go around saying, "I'm so full of love." But unless I bestow it on a person or a pet or a object or something it doesn't do a whole lot of good. The Bible says that you were created as an object of God's love. Get this! The very reason you're sitting in that chair right now, the very reason you're taking your next breath, the very reason your heart is still beating is this: God made you simply to love you. If God hadn't wanted to love you, you would not be alive. You would not be in existence. God thought you up in His mind and created you simply to love you. Because God is love.

He didn't need you. God wasn't lonely. God's never been lonely. But He wanted you and the number one reason you were made was simply to love you.

If you ever grasp the profound truth I just shared with you and you let it sink into your psyche and into your soul you will never again have a problem with inferiority or insecurity or low self esteem. Because when you realize that God created the entire universe just so He could create the conditions so that human beings could exist so He could create you and love you that's how much you matter to God. That's how valuable you are. That will take away all those feelings of insecurity. God created you in order to love you.

Unlike animals, we're made in God's image. That gives us the capacity to know and love God back. That's what makes you different from animals. You're never going to see a cow praying before its meal. You'll never see a kitty fold its hands and say grace before it eats. Why? They're not made in God's image. But God has given you the capacity to know and love Him back. That's what makes you uniquely human.

One day Jesus was walking down the street. A guy walks up to Him and says, "Lord, what's the most important command in the Bible?" And Jesus says this "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.*" Circle "first and greatest." God says the most important thing in life is to know and to love Him.

Next verse God says, "*I don't want your sacrifices. I want your love. I don't want your offerings. I want you to know Me.*" Can you sense the passion in this verse? Circle "know" and "love." That's the first purpose of life. The most important thing you can know in life is to know that God created you to love you. And the most important thing you can do in life is to know and love Him back. That's the number one purpose in life.

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What does it mean? It means that when you get up in the morning you ought to do something like this. Sit down on the edge of your bed and say, "God, if I don't get anything else done today I want to get to know You a little bit better and I want to get to love You a little bit more." Because that's the first purpose in life. To know and love God who created you to be loved by Him. If at the end of the day you have done those two things, it doesn't matter how many things have gone wrong in your life, if you know God a little bit better and love Him a little bit more that day was a success.

On the other hand, it doesn't matter how many deals you close, how many sales you make, how many achievements you wrack up, how many awards you win, at the end of the day, if you don't know God a little bit better and love Him a little bit more, you have just missed the purpose of that day. You have wasted that day. And that day is a failure. Why? Because God did not put you on this earth just to mark things off your ToDo list. That's a pretty shallow way to live. God did not put you on earth just to get up in the morning, go to work, come home, watch TV, go to bed, and go party on the weekend. He created you first and foremost to know and love Him, to get you ready for spending eternity with Him. If you've missed that you've missed the first purpose.

The first purpose of life is to know and to love God. That's who created you. He knows you and He loves you and He wants you to know and love Him back. The first purpose is to know and love God.

The tragedy is most people go through their entire life missing the purpose of it. They know all kinds of other things. They know the stock quotes, the sports scores, the top ten, who's on the cover of *People* magazine, and phone numbers. But they don't know God. And God says that's a tragedy.

The Bible says, "*Some people have missed the most important thing in life. They don't know God.*" You may know about God – "I know He exists." But do you know Him personally. Do you have relationship, a friendship, a love relationship with God. That's what God wants you to do.

How do you know when you're disconnected from God? How do you know when you don't really know God? You know about Him but you don't really know Him.

There's a warning light that comes on in your life when you are disconnected from God. It's called *stress*. Are any of you familiar with this term – stress? Worry is the warning light that at that moment in your life you're disconnected from God. Whenever I'm worrying it says, "I'm acting like I'm God. I'm acting like it all depends on me. I'm pretending I'm the general manager of the universe. That I've got to make it all happen. That God isn't going to help me. I'm out here on my own." That causes stress. The reason you're tired all the time, the reason you're fatigued, the reason you're stressed out is you're trying to live your life disconnected from God. It's like having a transistor radio with the battery pulled out. There's no power. But you plug in the battery and get connected to God you're going to hear all kinds of great things. This is God's plan for your life. He wants you to know and to love Him.

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The Bible says in Matthew 6 *"People who don't know God are always worrying."* Why? Because they think they're all on their own. God has wired you with a God-shaped hole in the middle of you so that you need Him in your life. There's this emptiness inside of us. The problem is we try to fill it with a lot of other things instead of God. You can try to fill that God shaped hole with passion or position or possessions or pleasure or popularity. Or you can try to fill that whole in your heart with sex or status or salary. But none of those things are going to fill the hole that only God can fill in your life. You were made by God and for God. Until you understand that there's going to be a hole in your heart that leaves you empty.

2. Here's the second purpose of life. The Bible says God formed me for His family.

In other words, God wanted a family. He wanted more than creatures. He didn't want just angels and animals and plants. He wanted a family. The Bible says the whole reason you exist is God wanted you to become a part of His family, which makes you unique. And that family is going to last forever.

The Bible says this *"God's unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family. [This is amazing!] by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This gave Him great pleasure."* Again, He did it for His own enjoyment. God wanted a family and He wanted you to be a part of it.

Your spiritual family, God's family, is going to even outlast your physical family. Physical families don't last. They grow up, they move away, they die, there's divorce, there's death. Physical families don't last. But the spiritual family of God is going to go on and on and on for eternity.

The Bible says that God never meant for you to go through life alone. In fact, God hates loneliness. When God created man, He put him in the Garden of Eden, a perfect environment and the first thing God said was *"It is not good for man to be alone."* He's not talking about whether you get married or not. That is irrelevant. Whether you marry or not is not the issue. The issue is God wants to put you in a spiritual family and that family is the family of God.

When you were born physically you automatically became a part of the human family. You didn't have a choice. The moment you were born you became a part of the human family. But becoming a part of God's family is a choice. You have to choose to become a part of it. You're not automatically a part of God's family. It is your choice. The Bible says this in 1 Peter *"God has given us the privilege of being born again so that we are now members of God's own family."*

What does "born again" mean? It means I make the choice to say, "I don't want to just be a part of the human family. I want to be a part of God's family. And I'm going to follow Him and His ways." It means I get a fresh start in life. Everything I've ever done wrong. Everything I've ever regretted. All the shame. All the things I wish hadn't happened in my past. God says, they're wiped out, forgiven! Completely start over. We're going to give you fresh clean slate. It's like starting over. New life. Fresh start. That's what it means – born again. It's not like reincarnation. It just means you get a fresh start on life.

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What is God's family? *"That family is the church of the living God. The support and the foundation of the truth."* This is very important. The church is not an institution. The church is not a bureaucracy. The church is not an organization. It's not a social club. The church is God's family. I don't know why some churches don't get this but they don't. It's not about rules and regulations and rituals and religion. It's about relationships. The church is about those who've decided to become apart of God's family forever and ever and it's all about love. It's about relationships.

It says *"That family is the support and foundation of the truth."* Underline "support and foundation." What happens when a building has no support and foundation? It collapses. We in California, understand this above everybody else. Because we have a thing called earthquakes. If you don't have a good support and foundation under your building it's going to collapse when the earthquake comes.

God says your life is the same way. You're going to have some earthquakes in your life – personal earthquakes, financial earthquakes, health earthquakes, emotional earthquakes. You may have marriage earthquakes if you get married. You're going to have relational earthquakes. You're going to have career earthquakes. When these tough times come along in life if you don't have a spiritual family you're going to collapse. You cannot fulfill God's purposes by yourself. God wired us to need each other. We need each other in the family of God.

That's why in our church we have 2600 small groups. The church isn't this group right here. It's the group that meets in little groups all over southern California, 2600 locations in small groups in homes in 83 different cities. When you have a problem and you're in a small group, they help you. When you're in the hospital, they take care of your needs. When you need a meal brought to you because you're sick, they bring a meal to you. In this church we take care of each other. Honesty, I feel sorry for people who don't have a spiritual family to take care of them when they're in a crisis.

1 Peter says this *"Love your spiritual family."* Are you doing that? Do you love your spiritual family? You say, "I don't even have one!" We invite you to be a part of Saddleback. There's lots of good spiritual families in this area. Just choose one.

Why is this important – Love your spiritual family. Because when you get to heaven two of the things you're going to do in heaven. One is love God and two is love the other people. It's called worship and fellowship. What does God want you to do while you're here on earth? The same thing. Practice! He wants you to not only love God, He wants you to learn to love other people. Why? Because God is love. He wants you to practice.

The second purpose of life is to learn to love others.

The first purpose of life is to learn to love God and the second purpose of life is to learn to love other people. Because God wants you to be like He is. He loves you and He loves others. That's why you need a church home. It's a laboratory for learning to love God's family.

I hear people say all the time, "I don't need a church. I can go out in nature by myself and I can worship God by myself in nature." Of course you can. Who do you think invented nature? God

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did! That's why you feel so close to Him in nature. Of course you can worship God on your own in nature.

But you can't love other people in nature by yourself. That's why you need a family. And God wants us to learn real love. That means to learn to love real people not just ideal people. So He put some people around us that are a little bit unlovable. I call them heavenly sandpaper. You know anybody like that? They kind of rub you the wrong way. God wants to teach you real love – "To dwell above with those we love, O that would be glory. But to dwell below with those we know, that's another story!"

Every family has an Uncle Wilbur, just a little bit out of kilter. A little bit off. He's coming to Easter dinner and you're going, "Oh no! Uncle Wilbur's going to be there!" They're in every small group. They're in every family. They're in every church. God intentionally puts them there so we can learn to love. The light's on but nobody's home. A few fries short of a happy meal. The elevator doesn't go all the way to the top. They don't get all the social clues. In every one of our 2600 small groups there's at least one person like this who just needs EGR – Extra Grace Required.

If you don't immediately think of who I'm talking about, I hate to tell you this, but you're it! If that person didn't come to mind – "Who is it in my family that's like that?" It's you! But we need you and you need us. Because God wants us to learn real love. It's easy to love the lovely people. But God puts us around people who are a little difficult to love because you cannot fulfill God's purposes on your own. Nobody has it all together. I don't, you don't. That's why we need each other.

The Bible says "*We belong to each other and each of us needs all the others*"

Let's review. Number one, you were planned for God's pleasure. So the first purpose of life is to get to know and to love God back. Second, God formed you for His family so the second purpose of life is get in a spiritual family and start learning to love other people. Love God and love other people.

3. God created me to become like Christ.

This takes a little explaining but once you understand it, life will make so much more sense. The bottom line is this – God wants you to grow up spiritually. When you grow up physically, that's automatic. You grew up automatically physically. You're an adult. But God wants you to grow up spiritually too. I know people who are 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years old physically. And spiritually they're still babies. God says I want you to grow up while you're on earth, grow up spiritually. This is the kindergarten, the preschool, the dress rehearsal. Grow up to be like My Son. Jesus Christ is the model of spiritual maturity. That's why Jesus came to earth. One of the reasons Jesus came to earth was to model what maturity's like.

The Bible says "*From the very beginning God decided that those who came to Him [in other words, those who chose to become a part of His family] and all along He knew who would should become like His Son.*" And the next verse "*We look at the Son and we see God's original purpose in everything created.*" This is God's Plan A not Plan B. From the very beginning He said, "*Let us make man in our image.*" God's goal has always been to make you like Himself.

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Don't misunderstand – not to become a god but to become godly, with godly character. You're never going to be a god. There's some cults out there that teach you're divine, you're god. You're no god. If you were a god you'd have all your problems solved by now. You're not god. You're just not god!

So what God wants you to do is He wants you to become godly in character – integrity, generosity, humility, all the characteristics of God.

God is far more interested in what you are than in what you do. Why? Because you're not taking your career to heaven. You are taking your character. Aren't you glad you're not taking your career to heaven? But God says, I don't care what you do. There might be a dozen different jobs and you say, "God, what job do You want me to do?" and God says, "Your choice. Whatever you feel like doing. Because I'm more interested in what you become while you're doing the job rather than what you do." God isn't interested so much in what you do as He is in what you become while you're doing it. Does that make sense? He's more interested in you than your job. So any job can be used to grow up spiritually.

The number one question I'm asked as a pastor is, "Why is this happening to me?" I'll tell you why. It's to help you grow up spiritually. Everything in life is designed to help you grow up spiritually – the good, the bad, the ugly, the stuff you bring on yourself, the stuff that other people do to you. God is not the author of evil. God never does evil. But God can bring good even out of bad. That's the cool thing about God.

Anybody can bring good out of good. Anybody can do that. But God specializes in bring in good out of bad. That's what Easter is all about. He turns crucifixions into resurrections. He takes a terrible thing – the death of His Son – and uses it to save the whole world. God brings good out of bad. There's nothing in your life that you can't learn from if you'll just respond with the right attitude. Instead of saying, "God, why is this happening to me?" say, "God, what do You want me to learn? What do you want me to learn from this?" Every situation in life will either make you bitter or better. It's your choice. It's how you choose to respond to it.

So the problem you're going through right now, every problem has a purpose. Every problem. And the purpose is to help you grow up spiritually, to not be a spiritually immature person. But to grow up. And the model of perfection is Jesus Christ.

Philippians says "*In your lives you must think and act like Christ Jesus.*" So the question then becomes if God's third purpose in my life is to grow up spiritually and to become like Jesus, what is Jesus like? The Bible calls it the fruit of the Spirit. It says, "*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self control.*" These are the qualities God wants to build in your life. He wants you to live a life that's overflowing with love, overflowing with joy, overflowing with peace and patience and all those things.

How does God then produce those qualities in my life? How does God grow character and help you grow up spiritually? How does He make you like Jesus? Are you just walking down the street one day and zap! God zaps you with love and for the rest of your life you love everybody? I don't think so! As I said, God teaches you these qualities by putting you in the exact opposite situation.

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He teaches you love by putting you around unlovely people. It's easy to love people who are cool, people who are like you, people you get along with. But He'll put you around some unlovely people.

How about joy? Joy's not happiness. Happiness depends upon happenings, circumstances. I can go to Disneyland and I'm happy. I come out and realize how much money I spent, I'm not happy any more. Joy is internal and God will teach you joy in the middle of grief.

How about peace? It's easy to be peaceful when you're out fishing by the lake – "It doesn't get any better than this!" No. God teaches you real peace in the middle of chaos. When everything in your life is falling apart and you say, "God, I need Your peace," and He puts you full of peace.

How does God teach us patience? Department of Motor Vehicles! Traffic jams. Doctor's waiting rooms. A thousand different ways to wait.

Becoming like Christ is a lifelong journey. It's a process. It's going to take the rest of your life for you to grow up spiritually. The Bible says, "*As the Spirit of the Lord works within us we become more and more like Him.*" Some of you are a little behind because you've been living your life not working on this and you've got some catching up to do. God uses troubles and trials and problems and pressures and other people. He uses all kinds of things in our lives to make us mature.

But here's the third purpose of life: To grow up spiritually not just physically. You're physically mature. God wants you to be spiritually mature. He wants you to grow up and become like Christ. He wants you to develop spiritual depth.

Do you know why that is so needed? Because it is the biggest problem in our culture. The biggest problem in American culture is shallow living. No depth. Shallow living. We are a nation of materialistic giants and spiritual midgets. I hate to say this but it's true. We are a nation of spiritual babies.

What do I mean? Think of what a baby is. Babies are totally self centered. All they think about is, I've got to do what's best for me. I've got to think of what's best for me. They're self-centered. They're self-absorbed. They're impatient. They don't know how to wait. I've got to have it now! I must have it now, even if I have to charge it! They're unable to delay gratification. Babies are totally focused on their feelings. Totally absorbed with the here and now. They have no long-term thinking. That's the way most adults are. I've got to do what's best for me. I've got to do what I feel. They're acting as if all that matters is here and now, not in light of eternity. They're living as if today only matters. They're manipulated by their needs. They're focused on their feelings.

The Bible says "*Some people have such shallow soil of character that when their emotions wear off and difficulty arrives there's nothing to show for it.*" What you need and what I need is spiritual depth. We need to grow up spiritually. We need a deeper life.

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God planned you for His pleasure. So the first purpose is to get to know and love God. God formed you for His family so the second purpose is to get in His family and start learning to love other people. The third purpose, God created you to become like Christ. He wants you to grow up spiritually, not just physically. There's a fourth purpose.

4. God shaped me to serve Him.

The Bible says in Psalm 139 *"You shaped me first inside and then out, You formed me in my mother's womb."* This is truth we've taught over and over at Saddleback church, that you are unique. You're not one in a million. You're one in six billion. God doesn't want you living up to the expectations of other people. God didn't create you to live to be what your parents wanted you to be or what your husband or wife wanted you to be or what your boyfriend or girlfriend wanted you to be. God wants you to be what He made you to be. You are unique. When you die and get to heaven God isn't going to say, "Why weren't you more like somebody else?" He's going to say, "Why weren't you more like you. I uniquely shaped you in your mother's womb for a purpose."

By the way, this is why we don't believe in abortion. If you had been aborted it would have short-circuited God's purpose for your life. Because God had a purpose for your life before you were even born. It didn't just start once you were born. God planned you before you were born.

God says there are illegitimate parents but there are no illegitimate babies. There are accidental parents but there are no accidental babies. God had a plan for you. I don't care if your parents were good, bad, or totally terrible, maybe they even abandoned you. The reason they were your parents is that God knew they had just the right DNA to create you. And God was more interested in creating you than He was in their parenting skills. That's why they were your parents. God wanted you. And He uniquely shaped you.

To help you remember how God shapes you and makes you unique from everybody else we use a little acrostic here at Saddleback. Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, Experiences. These are the five things that make you *you*. I don't have time to get into these today. We have a class here at Saddleback – a four hour class – that thousands of people have gone through to discover your spiritual shape. It helps you know, What kind of career should I have? What kind of ministry should I have? How should I be using my life? Because God uses these Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality and Experiences to make you *you*.

The Bible says *"God made us what we are [in other words, He shaped us] and in Christ Jesus God made us to do good works which He planned in advance for us to live our lives doing."* Circle "good works." Before you were even born God decided in advance what contribution He wanted you to make with your life. He wants you to serve Him on this planet. God didn't put you on this planet just to take up space, to breathe, to use resources, and to die. No. He put you here to make the world a better place. He put you on this planet to make a unique contribution, to serve Him by the shape that He gave you. And nobody else can be you. If you don't serve God the way God intended you to serve Him then the world misses that part of the jigsaw puzzle.

Another name for "good works" is "ministry." Any time you use your talents and abilities to help somebody else you are actually ministering to them. Notice 1 Peter 4 *"God has given each of you some special abilities..."* Be sure to use them to make a ton of money – Sorry! That's the

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Reviled Substandard Perversion of the Bible. The correct translation is “*God has given each of you some special abilities be sure to use them to help each other, passing on to others God's many kinds of blessings.*” You know the talents that you've got? I hate to tell you this but they're not for your benefit. God gave you your talents for the benefit of helping other people. God gave me my talents for the benefit of helping other people. They're not for me. They're for you. The person next to you, their talents are for the benefits of helping everybody else. God wired the universe so that we would need each other. Nobody's got it all together. I don't have it all together, you don't have it all together. Nobody does. That's why we need each other. The Bible says, “I want you to serve Me.”

When you get to heaven you're going to love God in heaven so He wants you to practice now. You're going to love other people in heaven, so He wants you to practice now. You're going to grow spiritually in heaven, so He wants you to practice now. And you're going to serve God in heaven, so He wants you to practice now.

Some of you have a misunderstanding of what you're going to do in heaven. You think that when you get to heaven you're going to wear a white robe, sit on a cloud, and play a harp. Folks! That would be hell! I can't think of anything more boring. If that's heaven, no thanks, God!

But think about this. Think about all the thrills, all the fun things you can do on this earth and this is an imperfect planet and God created this. Think about how much fun and all the thrills there's going to be in heaven. Look at all the fun stuff there is to do on earth and this is imperfect. In heaven it's going to be a blast! You can do all these bike flips like these guys do and never crack up. You could surf the big waves and never wipe out. It's going to be unbelievably fun. But one of the things you're going to do in heaven is serve, serve God. Here's the fourth purpose of life: To serve God by serving others.

You serve God by serving others. On earth it's impossible to serve God directly. You can't serve Him directly. The only way you can serve God on earth is by serving other people. So anytime you help somebody else God says it's like you're doing it to Me. You're practicing on earth what you're going to do in heaven. When you are unselfish, when you stop living this little self centered clod of life and say, I'm going to help other people with my life. God says, Now you're getting the point. You're practicing what you're going to do in eternity. We serve God by serving others.

We saw a dramatic example of this just this last week with Ashley Smith. In Atlanta, Ashley is part of a church that is doing 40 Days of Purpose. She was going through The Purpose Driven Life book. She went out one morning, about 1 a.m. to go get some cigarettes, had no idea that as she was walking back into her house Brian Nichols was going to stick a gun in her back and say, “Open the door,” and he took her hostage. He took her inside of her house, tied her up and put her in the bathtub. It looked like it was going to be murder number five. But Ashley had been reading about God's purpose for her life. She told Brian, “You're not an accident. God has a purpose for your life you were made to last forever. God wants you to practice on earth what you're going to do in eternity.” It started to sink in and he goes, “God has a purpose for me? In spite of all the stuff I've done?” Yes. There is no pit too deep that God's love is not deeper still. “God could reach out to me? I've already killed some people.” Yes. “What could my purpose be?” I don't know but if you turn yourself in and go to prison you may die for the people you've

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killed. But as long as your heart is beating God has a purpose for your life. It could be in that prison that He wants you to serve other people. Then Ashley not only told him that she said, "Can I read it to you?" He said sure and untied her. She went and got her Bible and a copy of The Purpose Driven Life. It just so happened she was on day 33, which was on how real servants act. She read about how we are to serve God by serving each other. She even practiced it. She got up and she made this guy breakfast and served him. It melted his heart. He turned around and served her by fixing some curtains for her. Then she convinced him to turn himself in and let her go. And the killing spree was stopped.

You may think, "I'm too far gone for God. I've done too many things wrong in my life. I've gone too many years without a relationship to God. It's too late." You are dead wrong. That's why God brought you here today. He wants you to know Him in a personal way.

By the way, I've been talking to Ashley every day this week. In a couple of weeks during this series she's going to come share her story at Saddleback church.

#### 5. God made me for a mission.

I don't have time to get into this but during the next four weeks we're going to focus on this exclusively – understanding and fulfilling your mission in life. I hope you'll come back for part two. Jesus said this "*In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world I give them a mission in the world,*" (... should you decide to accept Mr. Phelps.) God has a unique mission in the world that He has for you and only you can fulfill it. If you do not fulfill it the world gets cheated. That's what we're going to go into the next several weeks.

*"Where there is no vision the people perish."* Friends, this is true in every area of life. When there's no vision in a business the business falls apart. When there's no vision in a family or a marriage the marriage falls apart. When there's no vision in a nation the nation falls apart. When there's no vision in your personal life you drift through life. God doesn't want you drifting through life. He wants you to live a life of purpose and power and significance and meaning. He wants you to get on with His plan. We're going to talk about this the next four weeks. We're going to be talking about Experiencing the vision, Expecting the vision, Enjoying the vision, Expanding your vision and even Energizing your vision. But it starts today. It starts with you embracing God's vision for your life.

What does that mean? It means you say, "God, I've been doing my plan for my life long enough and it hasn't worked out. I've had my plans for my life and it's caused a lot of stress, a lot of tension, a lot of fatigue. I've had some heartbreaks. I've had some dead ends. I've had things not turning out the way I thought they were going to turn out. So God, I wasn't put on this planet to live my plan. I'm switching to Your plan today – Easter 2005. I'm switching to Your purposes which You put me on this planet for. I'm embracing Your vision for my life." That's the first step.

The Bible says, "*Those who embrace My ways are most blessed.*" Have you done that? Have you said to God, " God, I'm going to stop living my way and I'm going to start living Your way. For the purposes You put me on this planet for in getting me ready for eternity. I'm embracing Your purposes for my life."

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You say, "Why should I do that? I'm living the good life. I live in southern California." It's true. You are living the good life. The last two weeks I've been in Africa – Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda. Working with orphans. Those orphaned by AIDS and those orphaned by the genocide in Rwanda. Believe me, you're living the good life. They weren't. Those kids would love to have your problems. They'd love it. Because you live in Southern California you are living the good life. There's only one problem with the good life. It isn't good enough. It's a shallow, superficial life. The good life is all about looking good, feeling good, and having the goods. That is a shallow, superficial life. It has nothing to do with looking good or being good. You were made for more.

If there was a life that was better than the good life would you be interested in it? I would think you would. If there was a step up, if there was more than just the good life, that's not the ultimate in life. The ultimate is the better life. Wouldn't you want to know about it? Of course you would.

That's what Easter is all about. The Bible says "*Jesus included everyone in His death so that everyone could be included in His life. A far better life than people could ever live on their own.*" That's the life that God offers you today. Not the good life – the better life.

How do you get started in this better life, a life of purpose and peace and power? You open your eyes. "*Open your eyes and see how good God is. Blessed are you who run to Him.*"

I want you to pray a little prayer. Say, "God I'm running to you. I'm opening my eyes. I'm now switching from my plan for my life to Your purposes for my life." I hope by now you've realized you're not here by accident this morning. A thousand years before you were born God planned for you to be at Saddleback church Easter Sunday morning 2005 so He could get you to slow down long enough He could just get your attention and say to you, "You matter to Me. You're not an accident. I planned you before I planned the foundation of the world. I made you to last forever. I want you to live with Me forever. I want you in My family. I know everything about you and still love you and I want you to know and love Me back. I want you to grow up spiritually and I want you to learn to be unselfish and serve others. I have a mission for your life." But you've got to step across the line and say, "Ok God, I'm embracing Your vision for my life. I'm not going with My plan anymore. I'm going with Your purposes. "That's why you're here today. Whether you're sitting outside or in one of the venues or in here in the worship center.

This last week when I got back from Africa a lot had been going on in America. I did twelve national network TV interviews this last week. They all wanted to know the same thing, "Is there a common denominator spiritually between the killings in Minnesota, the hostage taking in Atlanta and the Terrie Schiavo case in Florida?" Of course I said there is. Everybody needs a reason for hope. The fundamental and most need for everybody is a legitimate reason for hope. Not a phony, false reason but a real reason for hope. When people feel hopeless they act in hopeless ways. They become advocates of death as is in all three cases.

You can go about forty days without food and you can go about eight or ten days without water and you can go maybe a minute or two without air. But you cannot exist without hope. So let me ask you a very personal question. On what are you basing your hope? On what are you basing your hope? Everybody is betting their lives on something. I have no doubt in a crowd

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this size some of you came in here today feeling hopeless about some area of your life. "I'm never going to get out of debt." You're hopeless about your finances. "I'm never going to get married... We're never going to have a baby... I'm never going to reach my dream ... I'm never going to see this problem resolved... I'm never going to feel any better..." You feel hopeless about some area. There are some of you I'm sure who are even feeling like throwing in the towel on your own life. Don't do it. God's purpose for your life is greater than the problem you are facing right now. Jesus Christ offers you the invitation of a lifetime.

Jesus says, "*Are you tired, worn out, burned out on religion. Come to Me for real rest and you'll recover your life and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.*" And the next verse "*It makes no difference who you are or where you're from. If you want God and you're ready to do as He says, the door is open.*" I love this because He says, I'm not offering you religion. Religion is not the answer, folks! Jesus didn't come to give you a religion. He said, I came to give you life! Not rules, religion, restriction, rituals. But to give you a relationship. You were made for a relationship with God. I don't care what your religious background is. You may be Catholic. You may be Protestant. You may be Jewish or Muslim s or Mormon or Buddhist or Baptist or no religion at all. It really doesn't matter. What matters is do you have a relationship with God who loves you and sent His Son to die for you on the cross.

It doesn't matter what your background is. It doesn't matter what you've done. What matters is the direction of your feet and where they're headed now. It doesn't even matter if you have doubts. I wish somebody had told me a long time ago that I could become a believer in Jesus and still have doubts. I would have done it a whole lot sooner. I used to think I had to figure out everything in the Bible before I could become a follower of Christ. That's ridiculous. I don't understand the chemistry of digestion but that doesn't stop me from eating a steak. I don't understand how internal combustion works. That doesn't stop me from driving a car. There's a lot of things in life that I benefit from without knowing how they work. Like a cell phone. And the Internet. A lot of stuff I enjoy but I don't have to know exactly how it all works.

I've been a follower of Jesus Christ for over forty years. There's still things in this book I don't understand. "Why did God say that? That doesn't make sense." I don't know why. But I know that God is God and I'm not and if I could figure it out I'd be God. But it hasn't stopped me from having a forty-year relationship and friendship with God. And living a life of meaning and purpose and significance. All I know is when I said, "I'm giving up my plan for Your purposes," my life got better dramatically. That's your invitation today.

Prayer:

As we close I want to pray for you and I want to lead you in a prayer. Father, I know there's some here who have been living the good life not realizing that there's a far better life, a life of purpose. Forgive us all for shallow living, thinking that life's only about collecting possessions, having pleasure, achieving popularity. I pray that today many will step across the line to the better life, the life of purpose and power and peace.

Now you pray. It doesn't matter the words you say. Just say it in your mind. Just say Yes to God. If you don't know what to pray you can say these words. Follow me in your mind, say "Dear God, I don't know if I've ever said this but thank You. Thank You for creating me and loving me. I want to fulfill the purposes that You made me for. Starting today I want to

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get to know You and love You and trust You. I want my life to bring You pleasure. I want to become a part of Your family. Help me to grow up spiritually like Your Son Jesus. I want to use the live that You've given me to serve You by serving others. Thank You for sending Jesus to die for me. In the weeks ahead help me to understand Your vision and mission for the rest of my life. Amen.”