

Campus Church of Christ Jail Ministry
Teacher's Guide
Series 1: Lesson #1
"What on Earth am I Here For?", part A
(from *The Purpose Driven Life*¹)

(all **green** text is for the teacher)

Preparation:

1. Read the sections for Days 1-3 from *The Purpose Driven Life*.
2. Review the scripture references in the lesson and related passages in your Bible; read through the teacher's version of the lesson; make notes / changes as desired.
3. Pick up the following from the Jail Ministry Table:
 - attendance/prayer request sheets
 - copies of lesson handout for the inmates in your pod (Remember, **don't** staple the pages.)
 - correspondence courses to give out to inmates who desire one
4. Other optional materials to bring:
 - White board marker and eraser
 - Sharpened pencils for inmates to use (be sure to collect all of them before they leave the room)

Before and as students arrive:

1. Welcome students and distribute student handouts
2. Make sure that any inmates who don't have a Bible know that they can fill out an inmate request form to get one that is provided to the jail by the church.
3. Pass the attendance roster / prayer request sheets around.
4. Always extend a greeting of encouragement and hope as inmates are arriving.
5. Open the class / lesson with a prayer.

Focus points for this Lesson:

(main points to emphasize through the lesson and to summarize in conclusion. If white board and marker are available, as you conclude and summarize each point, write it on the board.)

- It's not about me!
- We were born *by* God's purpose and *for* His purpose.
- God planned every person; no one was born by "accident".
- We discover our meaning and purpose only when God is the reference point of our lives.
- Living with purpose is living with peace.

“What On Earth Am I Here For?”, part A

Introduction

A few years ago, there was a movie titled, “As Good As It Gets”. Almost everyone of us has wondered and questioned why we were born, what we are supposed to do with our lives, and whether this is all there is. Is this as good as it gets?

How many of you have wondered about this? (ask for show of hands)
Do you think there is an answer? (allow for responses and discussion)

The first sentence in Rick Warren’s book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, says, “It’s not about you.”

In a book about finding purpose and meaning in life, why do you think he would begin with such a statement? (allow for responses and discussion)

(Day 1)

IT ALL STARTS WITH GOD

The search for the meaning of life – why am I here, what am I supposed to do with my life, etc. – has puzzled people for thousands of years. Some common questions people ask in response to this are:

- What do **I** want to be?
- What should **I** do with **my** life?
- What do **I** want out of life?
- What are **my** goals, **my** dreams, **my** ambitions for **my** future?

The reason that people seem to always be searching but never finding the answers to these questions is because the questions themselves are directed inward instead of upward. The answers to the questions about why we are here cannot be found inside of ourselves because, contrary to our culture, why we are here is not about ourselves at all!

Avowed atheist, Bertrand Russell, once said, “Unless you assume a God, the question of life’s purpose is meaningless.” (p. 17) This quote points out that even an atheist recognizes that meaning and purpose in life can only be found from and with God. Without a belief in God, there is no reason at all to even search for meaning. Only through a belief in God can one find meaning and purpose for life.

Key Point: It’s not about me. (P. 21)

What do you think the implications of this statement are? (allow for responses and discussion)

Job 12:10

¹⁰ In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

“The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It’s far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born **by** His purpose and **for** His purpose.” (p. 17)

“You didn’t create yourself, so there is no way you can tell yourself what you were created for!” (p. 18) We exist only because God wills that we exist, so we must look to God, our Creator, for the purpose of our lives.

Our world places a high value on being successful. It also defines success in terms of money, prestige, and power. We must be very careful not to confuse being successful, a quality defined by humans, with having purpose. There are many successful people who are also unhappy and unfulfilled because they don’t have a clue as to what their purpose in life is.

So how do we discover our purpose? We can either continue to listen to our culture as people have been doing for thousands of years, or we can find out directly from the Creator through His Word. “We were made by God for God – and until we understand that, life will never make sense.” (p. 18) “God is not just the starting point of your life, he is the **source** of it.” (p. 20)

What the scriptures in this lesson point out is that

1. “You discover your identity and purpose through a relationship with Jesus Christ.” (p. 20)
2. “God was thinking of you long before you ever thought about Him.” (p. 21)
3. “The purpose of your life fits into a much larger, cosmic purpose that God has designed for eternity.” (p. 21)

Verse to Remember: Colossians 1:16 (MSG)

¹⁶For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels--everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him.

Question to Consider:

In spite of all the advertising around me, how can I remind myself that life is really about living for God, not myself? (p. 21) (allow for responses and discussion)

Additional scriptures

Ephesians 1:11 (Msg)

¹¹In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,. . .

1 Corinthians 2:7 (Msg)

⁷God's wisdom is something mysterious that goes deep into the interior of his purposes. You don't find it lying around on the surface. It's not the latest message,

but more like the oldest--what God determined as the way to bring out his best in us, long before we ever arrived on the scene.

Romans 8:6 (Msg)

⁶Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life.

Romans 12:2 (NLT)

²Do not conform any longer 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.

2 Timothy 2:7 (NIV)

⁷Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Matthew 16:25 (Msg)

²⁵Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self.

(Day 2)

YOU ARE NOT AN ACCIDENT!

Some have been told by their parents or others that they were “accidents” – from unplanned pregnancies or even rape. This can have a devastating affect on how a person views himself/herself and, consequently what he/she does with his/her life. Again, this is human thinking, not the way God thinks. God tells us in His word that He planned each of us.

Verse to remember: Isaiah 44:2 (CEV)

² This is what the LORD says— he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you . . .

Key Point: We were born by God’s purpose and for His purpose.

“Long before you were conceived by your parents, you were conceived in the mind of God. God never does anything accidentally and he never makes mistakes. He has a reason for everything he creates” from the billions of stars across the vastness of the universe down to the tiniest microbe. Regardless of how you feel about your biological parents, God planned for you. He knew exactly which DNA was needed to make the unique person that you are. While there may be illegitimate parents, there are no illegitimate children”. (p. 23)

Isaiah 44:2a (CEV)

²I am your Creator.

You were in my care even before you were born.

Poem by Russell Kelfer: (p. 25-26)

You are who you are for a reason.
You're part of an intricate plan.
You're a precious and perfect unique design,
Called God's special woman or man.

You look like you look for a reason.
Our God made no mistake.
He knit you together within the womb,
You're just what he wanted to make.

The parents you had were the ones he chose,
No matter how you may feel,
They were custom-designed with God's plan in mind,
And they bear the Master's seal.

No, that trauma you faced was not easy.
And God wept that it hurt you so;
But it was allowed to shape your heart
So that into his likeness you'd grow.

You are who you are for a reason,
You've been formed by the Master's rod.
You are who you are, beloved,
Because there is a God!

When we consider the intricate, detailed, design in God's creation – whether looking into the magnificence of the heavens or at the miracle of a newborn baby, we can see that these things are not random. Nothing God does is random. God designed everything, in intricate detail, including you!

Psalm 139:15 (Msg)

¹⁵You know me inside and out,
you know every bone in my body;
You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,
how I was sculpted from nothing into something.

Key Point: God planned every person; no one was born by "accident".

When God planned you, He also had a purpose for you at the particular time and place where He brought you into existence. Before each of us was even conceived, He had planned who our parents would be as well as when, where, and how long we would live in order to fulfill His purpose.

Psalm 139:16 (NLV)

¹⁶Your eyes saw me before I was put together. And all the days of my life were written in Your book before any of them came to be.

Acts 17:26 NIV)

²⁶From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

Why has God done this? Because He loves us. He wanted us, then created us with a purpose in mind, and has promised to take care of us.

Isaiah 46:3-4 (NLT)

. . . I created you and have cared for you since before you were born. ⁴I will be your God throughout your lifetime--until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you.

Without God, all of life is random and there is no purpose for existing. Only with God as our frame of reference can we understand that there is reason for existing and a purpose for living.

Point to Ponder: I am not an accident. (p. 26)

Question to Consider: Considering that God uniquely created me, what area of my personality, background, and physical appearance am I struggling to accept? (p. 26) (allow for responses and discussion)

Additional scriptures

Ephesians 1:4

⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

Acts 17:24-28 (Acts 17:26)

²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

Psalm 138:8a

⁸ The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;
your love, O LORD, endures forever—
do not abandon the works of your hands.

(Day 3)

WHAT DRIVES YOUR LIFE?

Whether we realize it or whether we want to admit it, every one of us has something that is driving our lives. Could it be . . .

Guilt?

Resentment and anger?

Fear?

Addiction?

Materialism?

The need for approval, acceptance, and love?

The desire for success?

What is driving or directing the course of your life? (allow for responses and discussion)

Any of the driving forces we just identified will lead to a dead end life, one without meaning or fulfillment. "Without a purpose, life is motion without meaning, activity without direction, and events without reason. Without a purpose, life is trivial, petty, and pointless." "Without God, life has no purpose, and without purpose, life has no meaning. Without meaning, life has no significance or hope." (p. 30) **Key Point:** We discover our meaning and purpose only when God is the reference point of our lives.

As many may have experienced at some time in their life, living with a sense of hopelessness is a terrible way to live. This feeling of hopelessness was expressed well by Job in **Job 7:6, 16 (NLV) (CEV)**

⁶My days are faster than a clothmaker's tool, and come to their end without hope.

¹⁶Leave me alone and let me die; my life has no meaning.

Without God as our driving force, life is hopeless. With God, we have hope because we have purpose, and that gives us something to look forward to each day when we wake up. **Key Point:** Living with purpose is living with peace.

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

With God as our frame of reference, as we fulfill our purpose, we also receive additional benefits and blessings.

1. Your life is simplified because you have a standard by which to evaluate your choices in determining what you do and don't do, how you spend your time, your resources, and your energy.
2. You are focused and able to stay on a steady course instead of being pulled in every direction by all of the distractions and allures of life.

3. Because you are fulfilling your life's purpose, you are energized, motivated, and live life with passion.
4. You see the "big picture" – there's more to life than what is here on this Earth. This life is only a moment in the scope of eternity. We are here to prepare for there!
5. Trusting in your Creator to find and fulfill your purpose will produce in you an indescribable sense of peace and joy!

Verse to remember:

Isaiah 26:3 (NIV)

³ You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

Point to Ponder: Living on purpose is the path to peace. (p. 35)

Question to Consider: **What would my family and friends say is the driving force of my life? Is that what I want it to be?** (p. 35) (allow for responses and discussion)

Additional scriptures

Ephesians 3:20 (NIV)

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

Job 5:2

² Resentment kills a fool,
and envy slays the simple.

Matthew 6:24

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Isaiah 49:4

⁴ But I said, "I have labored to no purpose;
I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing.
Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand,
and my reward is with my God."

Ephesians 5:17

¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Philippians 3:13

¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Romans 14:10b, 12

¹⁰For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

¹²So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

John 14:6

⁶Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Conclusion:

Because God is the creator of everything and because He IS love, we can place our trust in His plan and purpose for our lives and our faith in the assurance that His way is the only way that will result in what is best for us. So, how do we begin to find out what His plan for our lives really is? We must understand and accept that (refer to these points that are already written on the whiteboard as you have the students review and summarize the main points of the lesson.)

- It is not about me!
- We were born *by* God's purpose and *for* His purpose.
- God planned every person; no one was born by "accident".
- We discover our meaning and purpose only when God is the reference point of our lives.
- Living with purpose is living with peace.

Closing the lesson / class:

Close the lesson with a **prayer**

Offer the booklet, "**Am I Saved?**" to any who may want a copy.

Offer **correspondence course packets** to those who desire them.

Let inmates know that **if they desire to be baptized**, they should fill out an inmate request form on which they should indicate that they wish to be baptized by someone from Snellville Church of Christ. Invite them if there is time to stay and talk with you about this after the others leave.

If time permits, teach the song. Read the words together first and make sure the meaning is clear. Sing the first verse for them to hear the tune (or play a recording if available – you will need to bring a boom box), then sing together.

References:

¹Warren, Rick. ***The Purpose Driven Life***, Section 1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

All scripture references are from <http://www.biblegateway.com/>

Song Lyrics:

My Task

To love someone more dearly ev'ry day,
To help a wand'ring child to find his way,
To ponder o'er a noble tho't and pray,
And smile when evening falls,
And smile when evening falls,
This is my task.

To follow truth as blind men long for light,
To do my best from dawn of day till night,
To keep my heart fit for His holy sight,
And answer when He calls,
And answer when He calls,
This is my task.

An then my Savior by and by to meet,
When faith hath made her task on earth complete,
And lay my homage¹ at the Master's feet,
Within the jasper² walls,
Within the jasper walls,
This crowns my task.

1 Special honor or respect shown or expressed publicly

2 an opaque form of quartz; red or yellow or brown or dark green in color; used for ornamentation or as a gemstone