



Week One: The Purpose Gene

Overview

This week's sermon is all about purpose. Using Philippians 3:7-11 as a basis, Jonathan compared an impressive life *without* divine purpose to an unimpressive life *with* divine purpose. He said that without a divine purpose a life was garbage. And he challenged us to allow Jesus to lift us out of small lives, to give us something bigger to live for—a rich and satisfying life, one with Jesus at the center, one that allows him to transform us and to use us to bring his transformation to this world. This week's study encourages you to think about your God-given purpose and to re-evaluate where your life is headed.

Getting to know you

- There is (of course!) more than just one purpose that God calls us to, but often there is one thing that is at the top of the list. If you were (over)simplify it down to just one thing, looking both backwards and forwards, what is God's unique purpose for you?¹ What is the main thing God has put you on this earth for? It might be:
 - Being a great Mum for your children
 - Making lots of money so you can give it away
 - Ensuring people in the third world get fed
- Take some time to think it through, and then share around the group about what one thing you think is (or perhaps should be) at the top of your list. (Note that choosing one thing doesn't mean that other things are unimportant to you.)
- Probe a little into each person's response
 - Why did you choose that purpose?
 - How do you know what God's purpose is for you?
 - What would (or does) living that purpose look like for you?
- The American theologian and author Carl Frederick Buechner once wrote: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Do you agree with him?

¹ Of course, there are some common things about God's purpose for all of us. "To know him and to make him known," for example. But what we're asking about here is what God has called you to specifically and uniquely in a way that is different from others.



Digging Deeper

- In the sermon Jonathan explored Paul’s comment that “For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him.” He focused on the strength of the word Skebelah, translated “garbage.” What do you think this verse is saying? Some Christians interpret this verse to mean that anything done by people outside of the kingdom of God has no ultimate value. Others are not so sure. What exactly is Paul’s reason for using such incredibly strong language here? (In answering this, it might help to have a look at the context of the verse, see Phil 3:7-11)
- According to Paul, living a life of divine purpose had three broad parts to it. Let’s look at each of those three in detail:
 - To know Christ
 - What does Paul mean by “knowing Christ?”
 - How can you tell whether this is a central part of your life?
 - What experiences have you had where Christ revealed more of himself to you than you had previously known?
 - What practices or disciplines have (or could) you put in place than enable you to know Christ at a deeper level?
 - To experience transforming power
 - What does Paul mean by “experiencing God’s transforming power?”
 - Can you give any examples when (over a short or long term) you experienced Christ’s transforming power in your life?
 - How do you open yourself up to experience more of Christ’s transforming power?
 - To suffer with Jesus
 - What does Paul mean by “suffering with Christ?”
 - Can you give any examples when you suffered with Christ?
 - If “suffering is a necessary consequence of obedience” how can we best prepare ourselves to endure well when suffering comes?



Taking it Home

- Does Paul’s understanding of his purpose on earth change your perspective at all?
- Jonathan contrasted the impressive looking resumes of a fictional kiwi - Anna King (and the apostle Paul pre-conversion) and somewhat unimpressive resume of the apostle Paul (post conversion). To what extent is your life about the former resume? To what extent is it about Paul’s new way of life?



Prayer

As you close, take some time to pray in quietness. Have someone read out each of these questions, and then leave 2 or 3 minutes silence between each. Encourage people to think and pray silently about them.

- What trajectory is your life on at the moment? Talk to God about it.
- What are you doing with your time, your gifts and abilities, your financial resources? Is this the place and purpose that God has called you to?
- Is the world any different in a better way because of what I am committed to right now? What would it look like for my life to align more closely to God's divine purpose for me?

Finish off with a closing prayer about the purpose of your group and our church, that like Paul, we would align our lives more closely with his divine purpose for us.