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1 It All Starts with God

*For everything, absolutely everything,
above and below, visible and invisible, . . .
everything got started in him and
finds its purpose in him.*

Colossians 1:16 (Msg)

*Unless you assume a God, the question
of life's purpose is meaningless.*

Bertrand Russell, atheist

It's not about you.

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.

The search for the purpose of life has puzzled people for thousands of years. That's because we typically begin at the wrong starting point—ourselves. We ask self-centered questions like What do *I* want to be? What should *I* do with *my* life? What are *my* goals, *my* ambitions, *my* dreams for *my* future? But focusing on ourselves will never reveal our life's purpose. The

Bible says, *“It is God who directs the lives of his creatures; everyone’s life is in his power.”*¹

Contrary to what many popular books, movies, and seminars tell you, you won’t discover your life’s meaning by looking


within yourself. You’ve probably tried that already. You didn’t create yourself, so there is no way you can tell yourself what you were created for! If I handed you an invention you had never seen before, you wouldn’t know its

purpose, and the invention itself wouldn’t be able to tell you either. Only the creator or the owner’s manual could reveal its purpose.


I once got lost in the mountains. When I stopped to ask for directions to the campsite, I was told, *“You can’t get there from here. You must start from the other side of the mountain!”* In the same way, you cannot arrive at your life’s purpose by starting with a focus on yourself. You must begin with God, your Creator. You exist only because God wills that you exist. You were made *by* God and *for* God—and until you understand that, life will never make sense. It is only in God that we discover our origin, our identity, our meaning, our purpose, our significance, and our destiny. Every other path leads to a dead end.

Many people try to use God for their own self-actualization, but that is a reversal of nature and is doomed to failure. You were made for God, not vice versa, and life is about letting God use you for *his* purposes, not your using him for your own purpose. The Bible says, *“Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life.”*²

I have read many books that suggest ways to discover the purpose of my life. All of them could be classified as “self-help” books because they approach the subject from a self-centered



Focusing on ourselves will never reveal our life’s purpose.



viewpoint. Self-help books, even Christian ones, usually offer the same predictable steps to finding your life's purpose: Consider your dreams. Clarify your values. Set some goals. Figure out what you are good at. Aim high. Go for it! Be disciplined. Believe you can achieve your goals. Involve others. Never give up.


Of course, these recommendations often lead to great success. You can usually succeed in reaching a goal if you put your mind to it. But being successful and fulfilling your life's purpose are *not at all* the same issue! You could reach all your personal goals, becoming a raving success by the world's standard, and *still* miss the purposes for which God created you. You need more than self-help advice. The Bible says, "*Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self.*"³

This is not a self-help book. It is not about finding the right career, achieving your dreams, or planning your life. It is not about how to cram more activities into an overloaded schedule. Actually, it will teach you how to do *less* in life—by focusing on what matters most. It is about becoming what *God* created you to be.


How, then, do you discover the purpose you were created for? You have only two options. Your first option is *speculation*. This is what most people choose. They conjecture, they guess, they theorize. When people say, "I've always thought life is . . .," they mean, "This is the best guess I can come up with."

For thousands of years, brilliant philosophers have discussed and speculated about the meaning of life. Philosophy is an important subject and has its uses, but when it comes to determining the purpose of life, even the wisest philosophers are just guessing.

Dr. Hugh Moorhead, a philosophy professor at Northeastern Illinois University, once wrote to 250 of the best-known philosophers, scientists, writers, and intellectuals in the world,



You were made by God and for God—and until you understand that, life will never make sense.



asking them, “What is the meaning of life?” He then published their responses in a book. Some offered their best guesses, some admitted that they just made up a purpose for life, and others were honest enough to say they were clueless. In fact, a number of famous intellectuals asked Professor Moorhead to write back and tell them if he discovered the purpose of life!⁴

Fortunately, there is an alternative to speculation about the meaning and purpose of life. It’s *revelation*. We can turn to what God has revealed about life in his Word. The easiest way to discover the purpose of an invention is to ask the creator of it. The same is true for discovering your life’s purpose: Ask God.

God has not left us in the dark to wonder and guess. He has clearly revealed his five purposes for our lives through the Bible. It is our Owner’s Manual, explaining why we are alive, how life works, what to avoid, and what to expect in the future. It explains what no self-help or philosophy book could know. The Bible says,

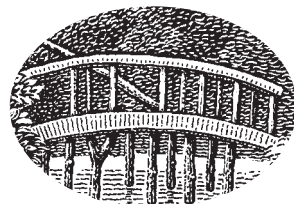
*“God’s wisdom . . . goes deep into the interior of his purposes. . . . It’s not the latest message, but more like the oldest—what God determined as the way to bring out his best in us.”*⁵

DAY ONE:
IT ALL
STARTS
WITH
GOD

God is not just the starting point of your life; he is the *source* of it. To discover your purpose in life you must turn to God’s Word, not the world’s wisdom. You must build your life on eternal truths, not pop psychology, success-motivation, or inspirational stories. The Bible says, *“It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.”*⁶ This verse gives us three insights into your purpose.

1. You discover your identity and purpose through a relationship with Jesus Christ. If you don’t have such a relationship, I will later explain how to begin one.

2. God was thinking of you long before you ever thought about him. His purpose for your life predates your conception. He planned it before you existed, *without your input!* You may choose your career, your spouse, your hobbies, and many other parts of your life, but you don't get to choose your purpose.
3. The purpose of your life fits into a much larger, cosmic purpose that God has designed for eternity. That's what this book is about.



Andrei Bitov, a Russian novelist, grew up under an atheistic Communist regime. But God got his attention one dreary day. He recalls, “In my twenty-seventh year, while riding the metro in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) I was overcome with a despair so great that life seemed to stop at once, preempting the future entirely, let alone any meaning. Suddenly, all by itself, a phrase appeared: *Without God life makes no sense*. Repeating it in astonishment, I rode the phrase up like a moving staircase, got out of the metro and walked into God’s light.”⁷

You may have felt in the dark about *your* purpose in life. Congratulations, you’re about to walk into the light.

DAY ONE

THINKING ABOUT MY PURPOSE

Point to Ponder: It’s not about me.

Verse to Remember: “*Everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him.*” Colossians 1:16b (Msg)

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?