

## A Purpose Driven Life?

What is the purpose driven life? In his popular book "The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?" Rick Warren claims simply to have taken the Westminster Shorter Catechism's first question and answer, and extended it into a devotional book. There are positive aspects to his book, such as his emphasis on the need to glorify God in all that we do. Yet there are considerable problems with it.

First, the book focuses on the reader. Notice its thesis statement:

By the end of this journey you will know God's purpose for your life and will understand the big picture how all the pieces of your life fit together. Having this perspective will reduce your stress, simplify your decisions, increase your satisfaction, and most important, prepare you for eternity. (p.9)

This statement appeals to the individual, who reaps the benefits. It is difficult to square this path with that of the cross (Matt. 16:24).

The same approach surfaces in Warren's instructions for personal evangelism. He centers evangelism, not upon the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, but upon the personal experience of the believer. Paul wanted to know nothing but "Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2), and wanted to preach only "Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23). Moreover, Paul saw the inextricable bond between the gospel and preaching: "But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" (Rom. 10:14). Paul instructed Timothy to be prepared to preach both in and out of season (2 Tim. 4:2). Why? Because he knew that Christ manifests himself through the preaching of the Word (Titus 1:3).

Warren, by contrast, tells his readers that their "personal testimony is more effective than a sermon, because unbelievers see pastors as professional salesmen, but see you as a 'satisfied customer,' so they give you more credibility" (p.290). To support his claim that personal testimony is more powerful than a sermon, he argues that many who won't accept the authority of the Bible will listen to a humble, personal story." While sharing personal testimony is certainly not inappropriate, Warren makes it foundational. Can the gospel be effectively communicated through a model of consumer satisfaction? While Christ is at the center of Warren's evangelism, so too is the believer, not as an unworthy recipient of God's saving grace, but as a satisfied customer.

Regarding worship, Warren writes that "every activity can be transformed into an act of worship when you do it for the praise, glory, and pleasure of God." He argues that "work becomes worship when you dedicate it to God and perform it with an awareness of his presence (p.67). While we should certainly do everything to the glory of God, this does not mean that every activity is an act of worship. If work is worship, what is the point of the Sabbath or attending

church? Work is not worship.

Warren's biggest problem is his interpretation of Scripture. At many crucial points, he appeals to Scripture incorrectly. Warren often quotes portions of verses, wrenching them out of their context. For example, he appeals to the Sermon on the Mount: "You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family" (pp.157-58). This is a distortion of what Christ said. He is not telling people that they should cultivate peace between men. Rather, peacemakers are blessed by God because they bring peace between men and God (Rom. 5:1).

Another example of poor Scripture interpretation is Warren's explanation of Genesis 9:1, 3: "God said, 'It's time to get on with your life! Do the things I designed humans to do. Make love to your spouse. Have babies. Raise families. Plant crops and eat meals. Be humans! This is what I made you to be' " (p.74). To put it mildly, this explanation has nothing to do with the dominion mandate.

Another element that strikes the reader is the self-promotion and marketing that is present throughout the book: PDL memory verse cards, prayer journals, music CDs, educational curriculum, and videos. Along with the many PDL products, there is the 40 Days of Purpose campaign for the local church. In October 2003 alone, over 4,000 churches launched their 40 Days campaigns. In order for a church to advertise a campaign, it has to pay a fee of \$750 to \$1,150 to the publisher. When you add the prospects of millions of dollars per month from churches offering the campaign, the millions of dollars in book sales, and profits from related merchandise, the publishers have created a financial windfall. But the gospel and vast profits are strange bedfellows. The gospel is free.

While there are some positive aspects to Warren's book, they are significantly outweighed by the negative aspects. While the book claims to be God-centered, it is difficult to harmonize this claim with its consumer-driven and self-centered approach. For these reasons, Warren's book cannot be recommended.

**By Rick Warren**  
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