

LIFE'S PURPOSE

Man has long wondered about the purpose of life: "Where did I come from? What am I here for? Where am I going?" We live in social turmoil, people striving frantically to "get ahead," to "make an impression," or to "look out for number one!" Yet in these pursuits no real satisfaction, no real sense of accomplishment is found. Trying to out-do others leaves us with an empty and worthless feeling. What is life all about anyway?

Solomon was a rich and powerful king, yet he was plagued by the same questions that bother us today. His search for life's purpose is recorded, with God's guidance, in the book of Ecclesiastes. And he recorded some answers, too! So this man who was "*granted wisdom and knowledge*" (2 Chr 1:12), the richest and most powerful man of his time, is certainly worthy to be heard.

Knowledge: Many believe that having wisdom and knowledge is the goal in the purpose of life today. Consider Solomon. God blessed him, and in 1 Kings 4:30 we read that "*Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.*"

If life's purpose is found in wisdom and knowledge, then Solomon surely found his purpose. But look at what he wrote.

"And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." (Ecc 1:17-18)

The many educational degrees that a person can earn may help to prepare him to live, but they can never satisfy man's inner needs. If someone gained all the wisdom the world had to offer, he would still be empty if that is all he had.

Riches: We also find out about Solomon that he was very rich (1 Ki 10:23). His personal annual income in gold alone would be worth more than \$200 million today! Well, could riches make his life meaningful? He writes in Ecclesiastes 2:9-11,

"So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor: and this was my portion of all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."

Riches were not enough for Solomon! Jesus warns us in Luke 12:15, *"Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* Really, how much money would it take to buy happiness? A home, a car? Then what would we want next? Christ put it in the proper perspective in Matthew 16:26. *"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* Obviously, riches cannot satisfy man's real needs and purpose in life.

Honor: How about honor and prestige? To be treated with the greatest of respect? To be the most famous person on earth? In his days, that was Solomon! (1 Ki 4:34, 10:24) Yet his fame could not satisfy him. He wrote in Proverbs 16:18-19, *"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud."*

When he looked at his life with all its power and wealth, he realized the truth and said,

"Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool forever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit." (Ecc 2:15-17)

Solomon had power and prestige but it wasn't enough. That is why Jesus warned about seeking *"the chief seats"* and *"salutations in the market places"* in Matthew 23:5-7. The praise of men is both fleeting and uncertain. It cannot

satisfy.

Worldly pleasures: Solomon had it all, including many women (1 Ki 11:1,3). If carnal pleasure is the answer to life's purpose, then Solomon certainly was not lacking. But notice his words in Ecclesiastes 2:1. *"I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity."* Pleasure was not enough.

Most of us would have to agree that Moses found purpose in his life; he accomplished great things. But his purpose was not found in seeking after carnal pleasure.

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." (Heb 11:24-26)

There is the key phrase: *"for a season"*. The pleasures of sin do not last very long. That is why carnal pleasure is not the answer to life's purpose. There are far too many empty lives in our society today, seeking after a life of fulfillment and purpose, but vainly trying to find it in pursuit of pleasure.

So what is life's purpose? We can never know until we first know its source. Where did "life" come from? Genesis 2:7 tells us, *"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."* God created us, and he gave us this life.

There is something of man that is not found in any other of God's creation, and Solomon wrote about it in Ecclesiastes 12:7. Man, formed from the dust, dies and returns to dust; but that is not true with ALL of man! The *"spirit returns to God"*. Our purpose is different from that of dogs and cows and other creatures God made. Our purpose is clearly stated in Ecclesiastes 12:13. *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."* That is our purpose of life. That is what Solomon discovered thousands of years ago. God gave us this life, and he intends for us to use it

a certain way.

Before the world was, God had a purpose for our life, and that purpose is found "in Christ" (Eph 1:3-6). God created us and gave us life so that we might bring Glory to Him. (Eph 3:11) That is the reason why Paul wrote that when we are "baptized into Jesus Christ, baptized into his death", we are then "raised to walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:3-4). Only in Christ do we find the meaning and purpose for which God created us in His own image and gave us life.

Our purpose in life is not to be found in the transient things that perish. The hope of the Christian is found in the eternal heavenly things (2 Cor 4:16-5:1). True purpose and fulfillment can never be found with our lives centered in this world. Only when we look beyond this life and the grave, can real meaning for life be found.

Christ alone can give purpose to our life and grant us the peace and eternal joy for which our soul hungers.

Adapted from a sermon by RAY MCMANUS
(Deceased)

APOLOGIA

QUESTION: Can you explain the practice of fasting?

ANSWER: *"And they said unto Him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink? And He said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days."* (Luke 5:33-35)

Situations In Which Fasting Was Practiced

At a Time of Mourning or Serious Concern:

- Death of King Saul and his sons (1 Samuel 31:7-13)
- King Darius and his concern about Daniel being placed in the den of lions,

"Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him."

(Daniel 6:18)

As a Petition:

- David and his child (2 Samuel 12:14-23)
- Ezra and Israelites upon returning from Babylonian captivity (Ezra 8:21-23)
- People of Nineveh upon preaching of Jonah (Jonah 3:5-9)

At a Time of Dedication:

- Exodus 34:27-28, *"And the Lord spake unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel. And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments."*
- Matthew 4:1-2, *"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward an hungered."*

Sending on a Mission Journey:

- Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:1-3)

Ordaining of Elders:

- *"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on Whom they believed."* (Acts 14:23)

Fasting In The Christian Dispensation

There are several examples of fasting in the Christian Dispensation. In Luke 5:33-35 (quoted at the beginning) Jesus enjoins fasting. Acts 13:1-3 (mentioned earlier) shows fasting by church at Antioch. Acts 14:23 (mentioned earlier) shows fasting in appointment of elders. Acts 27:33-35 records fasting on board the ship with Paul. In 2 Corinthians 6:5, Paul mentions our presenting ourselves approved before God in "**fastings**." In 2 Corinthians 11:27, Paul refers to his "**fastings** often."

In his instructions regarding marital relationship, Paul enjoins abstinence during times of fasting. *"Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time,*

that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency." (1 Cor. 7:5)

Principle In Fasting

Fasting is an expression to God, not something to be seen by men.

"Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." (Matthew 6:16-18)

What Is Involved In Fasting?

The length of time is as determined by oneself to be appropriate. Various lengths of time are mentioned in Scripture:

- Forty days and nights (Matthew 4:2, 1 Kings 19:7-8)
- Fourteen days in ship to be wrecked at Melita (Acts 27:33-35)
- Three days and nights (Esther 4:16)
- Twice in a week, perhaps one day each (Luke 18:12)
- Undetermined length (Acts 14:23)

Some in our day have engaged in juice fasts, but in the Bible fasts involved absence of both food and drink. Esther 4:16, "Fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day." Exodus 34:28 of Moses, "He did neither eat bread, nor drink water." To be sure, going without water for an extended period would be extremely difficult. It is my opinion, however, that under such circumstances of devotion one would receive added strength from God to endure. Regarding the situation with Jesus, Luke writes, "And in those days He did eat nothing: and when they were ended, He afterward hungered" (Luke 4:2). According to Paul (1 Cor. 7:5) fasting would also include absence of sexual relation between husband and wife during this period of time.

Consider the position of those whose physical condition could be severely harmed by fasting - such as diabetics. "I

beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). What would be accomplished, however sincere our purpose, if we jeopardize our ability to continue in effective service?

What If One Does Not Fast?

Fasting has the effect of causing us to feel humbled before our God. In Psalms it is written, "*The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit*" (Psalms 34:18). To fail to fast is to lose the humbling experience which is the very object of fasting.

Observations

Fasting is a matter of purposely subduing desires (even proper and reasonable desires) of the flesh in favor of the spirit. Upon finding Peter asleep, Jesus said, "*Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*" (Matthew 26:41). Upon instructing the disciples about their lack of proper faith, Jesus said, "*Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by fasting and prayer*" (Matthew 17:21). Fasting is a foregoing of the natural desires of the flesh in preference to pure, unhindered yielding to the spiritual.

Fasting appears to be somewhat an extension of prayer; that is, a greater effort, a sacrifice of usual desires, and a more concerted effort than simply praying.

Some today might dismiss fasting as archaic or applicable only to Biblical times. But Jesus clearly stated, "*The days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.*" (Mark 2:20).

HARRY COBB
(Wedowee, AL)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. God gave the Israelites a deliverer named Ehud. What fact was mentioned about him? HE WAS LEFT-HANDED (Judges 3:15)
2. In describing God's greatness, what three constellations did Job mention? THE BEAR, ORION, AND THE PLEIADES (Job 9:9)
3. Who was spared from slaughter by the six men with battle-axes according to Ezekiel's vision? THOSE WITH A MARK ON THEIR FOREHEAD (Ezekiel 9:4-7)
4. Who became upset when Jesus healed a woman on the Sabbath who had been bent over for eighteen years? THE RULER OF THE SYNAGOGUE (Luke 13:11-17)
5. In Paul's writings to Timothy, Paul said some will appear in the latter times forbidding what two things? MARRIAGE AND EATING CERTAIN FOODS (1 Timothy 4:3)

GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>PLACE</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
November 8 – 11	West Broad Street Wedowee, AL	Terry Darnell (Harrison, AR)
November 20 – 22	New Bethel Cullman, AL	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
November 27 – 29	Mount Carmel Road Gay, GA	Kevin Mills (Newnan, GA)
November 27 – 29	Willow Oaks Russell Springs, KY	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
November 27 – 29	Marrowbone Marrowbone, KY	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)
November 29 – Dec. 4	Bonaventure Road Savannah, GA	Harry Cobb (Wedowee, AL)