

**Sermon – What’s the purpose of life?
Sunday April 11, 2021**

If you had the chance to ask God one question, what would it be?

Students in a Grade 3 class came up with these questions for God.

- How do you love everyone in the world? There are only 4 people in my family and I can never do it.
- On Halloween I’m going to wear a devil’s costume. Is that okay with you?
- Who draws the lines around the countries?
- My grandfather says you were around when he was a little boy. How far back do you go?

Kids are the best, aren’t they?

So how about you? If you could ask God any question, what would it be? We did a survey and asked you that very question. And we got a lot of great responses.

So today we’re beginning a new series called *If You Could Ask God One Question*. We’re taking the 3 most popular questions and we’ll be exploring each one in the coming weeks.

Now if you’re watching this message and you don’t consider yourself a Christian, that’s okay. In fact, we’re so glad you’ve joined us. We love that you’re open and curious and want to learn. We hope this series will stimulate your thinking, spark discussion with others and help you to understand the Christian faith a little better.

We’d also love to engage with you. That’s why we’re running online discussion groups on the Wednesday evening after each message. The first one will take place this Wednesday at 8:00. All the information is in the link on the screen. **[Link: www.cornerstonechurch.ca/ask-god-one-question#discussiongroups]**

So what can you expect from these discussion groups? These groups will be a safe space to explore and go deeper with each message. Some of the pastors will be there. And you can share your thoughts or questions from that week’s message. Or you can sit back and listen as we discuss the message together. We’ve love to have you sign-up for any or all of the discussion groups.

So what’s the question for today? The question we’ll be exploring is, What’s the purpose of life?

Because of COVID, a woman was concerned about her 80-year-old father. So she invited him to stay with her.

One day he asked if he could borrow her newspaper.

“But Dad,” she said. “This is 2021! No one uses the newspaper anymore. Here, use my iPad.”

The father goes away. And a few minutes later, there’s a loud CRACK sound. The father returns and he has a huge grin on his face.

“Is everything okay, Dad? Were you able to work the iPad?”

“Yeah, everything’s fine, the iPad worked great! That fly never knew what hit him!”

This might seem like an odd way to begin today’s message. But there’s actually a point. And the point is this: **If you don’t know the purpose of a thing, it can’t reach its potential.** If you don’t know its purpose, you can’t honour it and you’ll likely abuse it.

Just like the father who didn’t know what an iPad was for. What is the purpose of an iPad? It helps you do things like surf the internet, watch movies, even preach a sermon.

But can you do any of that if you don’t know its purpose? Of course not. Instead you’ll take this beautifully-engineered device and destroy it by turning it into a fly swatter.

If you don’t know the purpose of a thing, it can’t reach its potential. You can’t honour it and you’ll likely abuse it.

This is true of an iPad, an iPhone or any technology. Do you know what else this is true of?

It’s also true of your life.

So what is the purpose of life? If you don’t know your purpose, you can’t reach your potential. You can’t honour your life and you’ll likely abuse it.

That’s why so many of you are frustrated. You’re frustrated because you don’t know your purpose. You don’t know what life is about. You don’t know what you were put on earth for.

Maybe you’re in school. You’re thinking about grades and getting a job. You’re thinking about relationships and your future. You have all these questions but you’re wondering, what’s the point of all this?

Maybe you’re married. And right now you’re fighting for your marriage. You’re exhausted and lonely. You’re putting in all this work. But your spouse doesn’t seem to care and you’re wondering, what’s the point of all this?

Maybe you feel stuck in your job. You don’t enjoy it and it doesn’t feel it even matters. And you’re wondering, what’s the point of all this?

Maybe you’re struggling. You miss going out and seeing friends. Maybe you have family members who are sick. Maybe you’ve lost a loved one. Maybe you’re anxious and depressed. And you’re wondering, what’s the point of all this?

How many of you have ever been frustrated because you don’t know why you’re her?

In one episode of the Simpsons, Homer asks God, What’s the meaning of life? But just as God is about to tell him, the end credits roll and the show ends.

At the end of a Monty Python film, the presenter is handed an envelope that contains the meaning of life. She opens it up and says:

"Well, it's nothing very special. Try to be nice to people, avoid eating fat, read a good book every now and then, get some walking in..."

Have you ever struggled to find answers to the meaning of life?

And when you do find something, it lacks any substance and leaves you even more frustrated?

It would be so much easier wouldn't it, if we didn't need these answers. We wouldn't feel so empty and confused. But you and I need to make sense of the world. Unlike animals, we need to know why we're here and what we're here for.

So what I'd like to do today is explore the question, What's the purpose of life?

Here's what I'm going to do. First I'm going to look at some of the most significant answers people have come up with over time. Then, I'm going to look at what the Christian faith has to say about this.

So are you guys ready? If you're ready, **type into the chat, "Let's do this!"**

Alright, let's go!

So what are some ways people have tried to find purpose?

Early on, **People looked to religion**. They believed the purpose of life was revealed by some kind of god or divine truth. So different religions offered different answers.

For example, Hindus believe that the purpose of life is to live a moral life. What does that mean? It means that when you do good things, good things will happen to you. How many of you know the name for this? It's called karma. Hindus believe in reincarnation. They believe that a universal power works by karma. If you do enough good, you'll have more karma which means that after you die, you'll come back with a better life in your next lifetime.

Buddhists believe that the purpose of life is to eliminate all desire. They believe that life consists of suffering. What's the cause of suffering? They believe that it's our desires. So if you can eliminate your desires, you'll free yourself from suffering and achieve a state of enlightenment that they call Nirvana.

Muslims believe that the purpose of life is to worship Allah. They believe Allah created the world and revealed himself to the prophet Mohammed. So what's the purpose of life? It's to live a life of devotion to Allah. If you live a good life, you'll get rewards in heaven. But if you don't you'll be punished.

Different religions offer different answers about the purpose of life. But they all believe that it comes from some spiritual truth.

Later on, many people rejected these ideas. They rejected the idea that you could find the answers in religion. So instead, **People looked to reason**. They believed that you could find the answers with your mind.

In ancient Greece, philosophers would debate this question.

Plato believed that the purpose of life was to attain the highest form of knowledge.

Aristotle believed that it was to attain happiness.

Epicureans believed that it was to enjoy the pleasures of life.

Stoics believed that it was to develop self-control and to overcome your emotions.

Different philosophies offer different answers about the purpose of life. But they all believe that it comes from reason.

So how about today? Where do we look to find purpose? In our culture, most people don't look to religion. They don't believe in God and if they do, they don't think he has the answers. Most people don't look to reason. They don't think we can find the answers through our mind.

In fact, our culture doesn't even believe that there is a purpose to the world. We've been so frustrated and disillusioned that we've given up on the idea that the world has any meaning. And since the world is inherently meaningless, where do people look to find meaning? **People look to themselves.**

Each person creates their own meaning and purpose. Whatever you're passionate about, that's your purpose.

Author Joseph Campbell says that, "The meaning of life is whatever you ascribe it to be. Being alive is the meaning."

But here's the problem. Since everyone creates their own meaning, there is no universal purpose to live for. Instead, we need to come up with our own meaning for ourselves.

For Eleanor Roosevelt, "The purpose of life is to live it and to taste experience to the utmost..."

For Jim Henson, "Life is meant to be fun, and joyous and fulfilling."

For Arnold Schwarzenegger, "The meaning of life is not simply to exist... but to... achieve and conquer."

Do you realize what this means? This is the first time in human history that our culture doesn't have any answers. It can't tell us what our purpose is.

Instead of answers, we're supposed to create our own. We're supposed to figure it out ourselves.

What does this mean for us? It means that the responsibility to find meaning falls on us. You're responsible for creating your own purpose. And that's a lot of pressure! This pressure has created a crisis for us.

That's why so many of you are struggling. You don't know who you are and why you're here. You don't know how you're supposed to live or if your life even has any meaning.

If you're younger you're feeling this. You feel the pressure to do something great with your life. But you have no idea what that is. That's why you feel anxious and overwhelmed.

If you're older you're feeling this too. When you reflect on your life, you ask yourself, What have I been living for? Have I wasted my life?

To make things worse, this pandemic has heightened your feelings. Because we've all had losses. Maybe you've lost your job, your health, your marriage or your dreams. And it's making you wonder, What is it that gives my life meaning? What is it that I'm living for? Maybe you're not so sure anymore. That's why you're confused and depressed.

So where do you go to find purpose? Do you look to religion and find it in a spiritual truth? Do you look to reason and find it through your mind? Or do you accept that there is no purpose and create your own meaning?

If you don't know your purpose, you can't reach your potential. You can't honour your life and you'll likely abuse it.

So what is the purpose of life?

It's been said that **no one can know their purpose without first knowing the Person who created them.** So let's change gears now. Let's look at what Christians believe. Christians don't believe that the world was made by accident but that it was made for a purpose. And that purpose is revealed in God's Story. This story has 4 parts.

The first part is called **Designed for Good.** It begins in the opening pages of the Bible.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (Gen 1:1-2)

Verse 2 says that in the beginning, the world was formless and empty. God's spirit was hovering over the waters. What are these waters? In the ancient world, water represents chaos and disorder.

In other words, the Bible says that God brings order out of chaos, and purpose out of disorder. Why? Because God is a purposeful God. He created the world with a purpose.

The world he made was Designed for Good.

At the end of each day, there's a refrain that's repeated. God looked at what he made and saw that it was... what? Meaningless? Empty?

No, at the end of every day, the Bible says *God saw that it was good. God saw that it was good. God saw that it was good.*

Type into the chat, "God's world was designed for good."

God made a good world. A world of eucalyptus trees, windy rivers, majestic mountains. A world of gazelles, elephants and dolphins. A world of beauty where life flourishes.

But the pinnacle of his creation is when he makes human beings. After making them, the Bible says,

Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! (Gen 1:31)

Everything he made was good. But people were very good. Why? It's because,

God created human beings^[d] in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

Only humans are made in the God of image. What does that mean?

First, it means that **we reflect God's character.** When we love and care for others, when we serve and put others' interests ahead of our own – we're like a mirror. People see us and they can see a bit of who God is and what God is like. We're created to reflect God's character.

Second, being made in God's image means **we've been given authority to rule.** The Bible says,

Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground." (Genesis 1:28)

As God's image bearers, we are his representatives. God gives us authority to rule and participate in his work of creation. How do we do that?

The Bible uses the image of gardening. I don't know about you, but the idea of gardening terrifies me! Some of you have that green thumb and everything you touch grows. Well, that's definitely not me. I think that I've killed every plant that's ever come into my house!

But gardening isn't just about growing plants. **Gardening is about cultivating potential and creating something that will bless others.** It's harnessing raw material and turning it into something beautiful.

It's creating inspiring music and art.

It's teaching children.

It's making a needed product or providing a helpful service.

It's creating a business that helps others.

In ruling the world, our day-to-day activities are to become acts of worship. Acts that honour God and bless others. That was God's purpose. But the story takes a tragic turn.

The second part of the story is called **Damaged by Evil.**

You see, God's purpose was for us to reflect his character and rule his creation. He created the world in a way where life would flourish when we serve others and put their interests ahead of our own. This was God's definition of good. We were to trust God and trust that his way leads to life.

But people couldn't do that. Instead of trusting him, they wanted to be in charge, they wanted to make the rules.

We see this when Adam and Eve take the fruit. This fruit comes from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was forbidden to them because only God has the wisdom to define good and evil.

But they couldn't accept that. The Bible says that they wanted to be like God. They wanted to decide for themselves what was right and wrong.

So what do they do? They disobey God and they take the fruit. And in that moment, everything spirals out of control. Every relationship gets damaged by evil.

First, **our relationship with the world is damaged.** Instead of taking care of the earth, we abuse it. We exploit its resources and pollute the environment. Our concern isn't for the impact on others or on the environment. Our concern is for ourselves and our own lifestyle.

Second, **our relationship with each other is damaged**. Instead of taking care of each other, we hurt each other. Adam and Eve suddenly realized how vulnerable they were and they didn't trust each other anymore. So what do they do? They make clothes.

Why is that significant? It's significant because before the Fall, they were naked and knew no shame. But now they make clothes to hide themselves. Later when God confronts them, they blame each other and accuse each other. Blame and hiding are now part of our human relationships.

And third, **our relationship with God is damaged**. Adam and Eve used to go on walks with God, they had a close relationship with him. But now that intimacy is broken. They're afraid of him and hide from him. They don't let God meet their deepest needs anymore. Instead, they try to meet their needs on their own.

The world was designed to flourish when God's purposes are at the centre. But when human beings put themselves at the centre, everything falls apart. This is now the condition of the human heart: the tendency to make ourselves the centre and to use everything (including God) to serve our purpose. Do you know what the Bible calls this? Sin.

And it's this sin that's at the heart of all the evil we see in the world. Racism, violence, human trafficking, corruption, disease, environmental abuse. Sin has infected our cultures, our institutions, our governments.

Our world is a mess. The problem isn't just in the world, it's in our hearts. But God loves us too much to leave us this way.

So the third part of the story is called **Restored for Better**. The good news is that God has a plan. A plan to rescue and restore us. So what does he do?

Two thousand years ago, he sends his Son Jesus into the world. Jesus would grow up and show us what it looks like to be truly human. To live the way we were supposed to live. What does that look like?

It looks like love. Jesus would love not just his friends, but also his enemies.

It looks like serving. Jesus would put himself under others and wash their feet.

It looks like obedience. Jesus obeyed his Heavenly Father even when it meant rejection, suffering, and even death.

Jesus had a mission. To proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God is here.

One theologian says that **the kingdom of God is wherever what God wants done is done**. In other words, it's where evil and injustice are replaced with love and service. It's where people are healed and restored to become God's image-bearers once again.

Jesus confronted the evil and death that we created when we rebelled against God. He took them on and let it kill him. But when he died so did the power of evil. The whole creation was made right again with God.

The Apostle Paul says, For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. (Colossians 1:19-20)

Jesus died on the cross. But three days later, God raised him to life. This victory is at the heart of the Christian faith because his resurrection means that a new future has begun. There's now a new way to be human again because the power that raised Jesus from the dead is now available to us!

James Choung calls this, "... a cosmic participation: we've died with Jesus and our evil and damage die with him, but we also live in Jesus and seek to live with love, service and healing through him."

This leads to the fourth part of the story which is called **Sent to Heal**.

Jesus started a movement. A movement to restore God's world to its original purpose. This movement inaugurated God's kingdom. One day, this kingdom will arrive in all its fullness. Evil will be defeated once and for all. The world will be renewed, God will be on the throne and people will rule this new world with Jesus as their King.

But in the meantime, Jesus invites you and me to join him in his mission to restore this fallen world. He sends us into the world to bring healing and love.

Many people want to do this work apart from Jesus. They want to make a difference but they want to do it their own way.

But here's the thing. The problem we face isn't mainly about politics, economics or the environment. This means that the ultimate solution isn't found in policies, technology or education.

Instead the Bible says that, ...we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

In other words, the problem we face is spiritual. It comes from the evil in the world and the self-centredness of the human heart.

Think about the revolutions that have taken place. Well-intentioned movements have justified violence in the name of their cause.

But whenever people try to make things better apart from Jesus, things always get worse. For real change to happen, we need the love of Jesus. The work of healing must begin in us! We need to become the change we want to see.

This brings us back to the garden.

God created people in his image. He wanted a people who would reflect his character. A people filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. A people who would serve and care for others. A people who would love their neighbours *and* their enemies.

In other words, a people in whom God's image is being restored.

How do we become that people?

When Jesus announced the good news of the kingdom, he invited people to repent and believe. Repentance in the Bible doesn't mean feeling sorry. In the New Testament, to repent literally means to turn around. It was a military term that described a soldier marching in one direction and then turning to go in the opposite direction.

So to repent means changing the direction of your life. Instead of living for yourself, you live for God and his purpose. This is how God transforms you from the inside out.

And as he does that work, he invites you to join him in his mission. To go into the world to restore it.

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus commissions his disciples.

go and make disciples of all the nations,^[1] baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

Many of you feel empty because you don't know your purpose. And if you don't know the purpose of a thing, it can't reach its potential.

So what's your purpose?

Let me tell you what your purpose isn't. Your purpose isn't to have a great career. It isn't to be popular. It isn't to have stuff.

Your purpose is to fulfill God's purpose. It's to join Jesus in his mission to restore the world. **Nothing in life will fulfill you like doing what fulfills God's purpose.** You'll never find more significance than when you serve others. You'll never find more joy than when you share God's love.

So if you want to make a difference for Jesus, **type into the chat, "I want God's purpose."**

Nothing in life will fulfill you like doing what fulfills God's purpose.

But maybe you're thinking, restore God's world? That's a pretty big job. I don't even know where to start.

Here's the thing. God doesn't call you to restore the world on your own. God calls *his people*, the church to restore the world together. That's our mission. And each one of us has a unique role to play.

Because you have a unique story. You have wounds that no one else has. You have gifts and can do things that no one else can do. This means that you can reflect God to the world and bring his healing in a way that no one else can.

Growing up, I always felt like an outsider. Now I help others connect in community and grow together in small groups.

Some of you experienced trauma that you're using to help others in their healing journey.

Some of you use your gifts to teach children or disciple adults.

Some of you use your time to care for neighbours or other vulnerable people.

Some of you use your resources to help the poor or support the marginalized.

But no matter what your role, there's nothing in life that fulfills you like doing what fulfills God's purpose. You'll never find more joy and significance than when you do what God designed you to do.

So how do you live into God's purpose for you?

You need Jesus. You need him to forgive your sins. You need him to heal your wounds. You need him to give you purpose.

If you want to live the life you were meant to live, **type into the chat, "Jesus, give me your life."**

The Bible says that, we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:10)

If you want the life you were designed to live, I want to pray for you now and I want to invite you to pray this prayer with me.

Dear Jesus,

I give you my life. Forgive me for making it all about me. I confess my sins and ask for your forgiveness. Would you save me and make me new.

Make me into the person you created me to be. Fill me with your spirit so that I can live for you. My life is not my own. I give it to you so that I can serve your purpose today and everyday.

Amen

Now if you just prayed this prayer, **type into the chat, "I've joined God's mission!"** We're so excited for you and for this new work God is doing in your life! And we can't wait to serve together with you!

So what's your next step? In the Bible, whenever people gave their life to Jesus, they would get baptized. Baptism is an outward expression of an inner transformation. We'd love to support you and walk with you in this journey.

Simply go to the link on the screen, follow the instructions and one of the pastors will get in touch with you. **[Link: www.cornerstonechurch.ca/baptism]**

If you don't know the purpose of a thing, it can't reach its potential. So what's your purpose? It isn't to be popular, powerful or accomplished. It's to fulfill God's purpose. It's to be renewed in God's image. It's to join him in his mission to restore the world.

Growing up, my purpose was to have a great career and make lots of money. As a Chartered Accountant I had all that but something was missing. I've since found my purpose in Jesus. And I can't begin to tell you how full and meaningful my life is.

I hope that you find your purpose in Jesus. May God bless you as you live out your purpose and share God's love wherever you go.

Now check out this video...