

Why I...Live  
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We're starting a new series today called "Why I". Why I live, why I laugh, why I doubt, and why I trust. These are some interesting questions that we're asking, and if you're like me, when you ask yourself a question, you usually stop with your own answers. I do...when I ask myself, "Why do I live?", I will come up with my own set of answers...most of which will make me look better than I really am! You know what I mean?

So I want you to take a few seconds now and answer the question for yourself...why I live...and write down your responses on the outline.

There could be lots of reasons we exist, right? Some of us live to eat...some live to golf. Some live for their kids. Some live to fulfill their desires. Some live to fish, some live to take care of others. Some live to work. Some live to help others.

Some of those answers may be better than others, so we need to take these questions deeper...we need to go beyond our answers to what God's answers are. That is where things get interesting. What is God's opinion of why I live? That's where we want to go today!

Before we get there, however, I want us to look at a problem that many people struggle with. There are many people who cannot come up with any answer to this question. They do not feel a sense of purpose for their lives. I'm not just talking about average Jane's and Joe's either. There are some highly accomplished and very public and famous people who have trouble seeing the value of their life. Owen Wilson, one of my favorite comedic actors from films like Night and the Museum and Shanghai Noon, attempted suicide a few weeks ago. Here's a film star, making fun movies, living large, and he's probably not able to answer the question we're posing today. How many more are there...famous and accomplished people who have come to some point in their life and discovered that it wasn't enough. This question blind-sides them and they realize that their life is empty. They don't have an answer that overcomes meaninglessness. And there may be someone here today that is in a similar place...when you ask this question, you don't have an answer. Not having an answer to that question can be paralyzing...or worse.

If you are anywhere near this place today, then my prayer is that you truly find your real answer to "Why I live". We're going to look at a picture of the life God wants us to have and how to either find or stay on that path.

**The Biblical Picture of "why I live".**

So as we push this question deeper to discover what God's answer to this question is, we need to first look at what he has already said about this in scripture.

We know that God desires that we would experience a meaningful life because Jesus said in **John 10:10, *I came so that everyone would have life, and have it in its fullest.*** (CEV) One of the things Jesus is saying here is that one of his purposes, the reason that he came to earth, is to share abundant life with us. So this does tell us that God is fairly serious about giving us purpose and meaning in life...so much so that he sends his son for that purpose.

In the larger context of this passage, Jesus is also telling us that we find that full life in relationship with him. So not only is it God's desire for us to have full life, God makes it possible for us through our relationship with Jesus. Jesus puts it this way... **John 15:5, *I am the vine; you are the branches. If you stay joined to me, and I stay joined to you, then you will produce lots of fruit.*** (CEV)

And what is this fruit that our lives are meant to produce? Well, let's look at Paul's description of the fruit of God's Spirit from **Galatians 5:22, *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*** So the fullness of life that Jesus brings us is painted here as a life that is filled with more love and consuming joy. It has a deep sense of peace with God no matter what the circumstances of life are. This full-life is patient with others, it extends God's mercy to others, and people see in us a deep sense of goodness because we are doing good things with our life. The full life has a deep sense of trust in God, and it reflects God's gentle ways with us, not hostility and anger and bitterness. The full life with Jesus has the power to help us exercise proper restraint, avoid over-indulgence, and keep proper boundaries in our life.

So Jesus came to bring us a God-filled, abundant life. And that life looks a lot like the fruit of the spirit...but how do we get from God's desire for us to fully experiencing all of this fruit in our lives? Many of us can look at this list, and say, like I do, I see that one and that one, but patience? Self-control? Maybe someone with anger issues doesn't see kindness and gentleness. How do we experience all of the fruit of the spirit?

To me, that answer is in the verse about the vine and the branches. There is a teaching here for us that is counter-cultural. And it's essential for us to experience fullness of life. In our world, we are usually the end-user, the consumer. When we buy a product, we keep it...hold on to it...and use it the way we want to. When we buy a service, like power for our home, cable for our TV, or insurance on our car, we are the beneficiary of that service. We don't buy it for someone else, we buy it for us. Consumer mentality promotes an attitude of "it's all about me!" And I think we often carry this consumer, end-user mentality into our spiritual life. We even bring it into our expectations of church – or more correctly, what the church should do for me.

I want you to take a quick look at a video called **ME CHURCH**. It's a highly satirical little comedy skit about the consumer mentality that we sometimes bring to church. **Start video – me church.**

That's pretty funny...even if it is to an extreme, but it makes the point...sometimes we think of the fullness of life as something we just receive. And that's true to a point. It is a gift we receive. But it's not a gift we hoard. Jesus wants us to clearly see that we are branches. The life giving force doesn't stop at the branch, it goes through the branch to the fruit. And branches don't produce fruit for their own sake, but for a greater purpose.

The fruit of the Spirit are God's gift to us...but we don't experience them fully, we don't experience the fullness of life UNTIL we give it away...until we let God use our life to pass those gifts on to someone else.

Jesus was very clear in his example and his teaching that the abundant life comes both to us and through us most powerfully in humble servanthood.

#### Jump Starting the "fullness of life" in my life

You probably know this story...it's from John 13. The scene is Jesus' last meal with his followers on the night before his crucifixion. As they gather, Jesus takes on the role of the least of them, the servant whose obligation it is to wash the feet of everyone else. As he finishes, he says to them something like, "I have set an example, and you should do for each other exactly as I have done for you." To Jesus, there is nothing greater, nothing more honorable, nothing more God-like than to take the humble role of being the servant, not the served.

Serving others is the jump start – it is the catalyst – that launches us into the fullness of life that God desires for us to experience. Serving others is the key that unlocks God's purposes for us.

#### Living life on purpose

And what are these purposes that God has for every Christian? For the Christian, there is no such thing as waiting for God to give you a purpose. God has already given us our purpose in life...they are right there, in the Bible. Here at Saint Paul's, our mission is to lead people to an active faith in Jesus Christ, and we believe that an active faith happens when we are living out the five overarching purposes for the Christ-follower in a small group.

What are these five purposes? They come from two critical sayings of Jesus...the great commandments and the great commission. Jesus is asked "what is the greatest commandment" and his response is that the greatest commandment from the Old Testament is "to love the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul and strength" and then he says that the second is just as important..."to love your neighbor as yourself."

When we express love to God, that is called **Worship**. Loving our neighbor means that we will have **Fellowship** with them AND we will demonstrate love to them through **Ministry**. So there are three of the greater purposes for everyone of our lives.

The Great Commission of Jesus happens when he is giving direction to his disciples after his resurrection in Matthew's gospel. And he gives them their marching orders, so to speak, when he says, "Go everywhere to share with good news with anyone" and "to teach them to follow me". So from these marching orders we pick up a couple more purposes that apply to the life of every Christ follower; Sharing the good news with others is called **Evangelism**, and teaching people to follow Christ with their life is called **Discipleship**.

Sometimes we get this idea that we're not going to do anything until God makes it clear to us exactly what it is that he wants us to do. And I do believe that there may be times when God wants to give a special call or direction to someone who is already striving to live out these 5 purposes. But for those of us who are not striving to live out all 5 purposes in our life...who are not making that a priority...then waiting for God to give you direction is a cop out. I'm sorry, but it is. It is an excuse to not change your life for God's purposes.

So if you're here today and you're thinking, "I am searching for something more meaningful in life, I am feeling an emptiness, I am desiring to experience this fullness of life that Jesus talks about", then there are 3 things you can do starting today...

1. You can begin or renew your relationship with Jesus, the source of abundant life.
2. You can jump start your spiritual life by finding some way to serve God by serving others in ministry.
3. You can begin to apply these five purposes to your life...

I grew up in a pastor's home. We were in small towns, mostly. I lived in 5 Missouri towns, Columbia, Hannibal (twice now), Cape Girardeau, Sikeston, & St. Clair before I went to college. If you want to know what it is like to grow up in a pastor's home, especially in smaller churches, then just think of an aquarium. I couldn't go anywhere or do anything that there wasn't a church member somewhere that was watching and reporting my activity to other people or back to my parents

When I set off for college, I was heading into math and chemistry to be an engineer. When I arrived on campus, I joined the band...I think I've told you before that I was a band geek... The band director had such a passion for music and made it so much fun that my love for music and for playing was ignited and I switched my major. This director's name was Keith House. Prof House became a mentor to me. I took my private lessons with him, and those lessons were as much about life as they were about music. I think I've shared with you that I was abandoning the Christian values of my parents at that time...and I was searching for my own way...and I was pretty wild and reckless. And God placed Prof House in my life....he was the only Christian influence with any credibility in my life on that college campus.

Somehow, during my junior year, I was selected for a service scholarship. The benefit was awesome...free tuition...and the idea was that students would be placed in service positions for the entire summer. Of all the opportunities, I was placed in a church as a summer youth director, in Aurora, MO...summer of 1983. I didn't have a calling...no light from the sky opened up on me...in fact, I didn't even have a relationship with Jesus...but there I was. I faked the being Christian part, but one thing was very real...I had a good time with those kids that summer. And taking the role of a servant began to change my life. I felt more meaning and purpose that summer than I ever had in my life simply because I took on the role of serving others.

I went back to school for my senior year, and nothing changed for me there. In fact it was the wildest year of my life. But guess where I was that next summer, by choice...back in Aurora. I was drawn by the sense of purpose and meaning I had experienced there. That summer, I became a follower of Jesus, I invited him into my life and asked him to lead me into abundant life.

By the next fall I was working in Kansas City in a church as a director of Junior High youth. Within a few months, I felt like Jesus was asking me to be a full-time servant by becoming a pastor. And in a unique experience, Jesus showed me that all my past experiences, good and bad ones, could be used as a way to let God's grace pass through me to others. My moving around had forced me to develop skills at creating and building relationships. In my wild years, I experienced the emptiness of the soul, and the failure of searching in alcohol, drugs, even in music for meaning that lasted. I knew that inner hunger so many others experience, and I knew where that hunger could be satisfied, that it came through a real, living, relationship with Jesus...something that I had been very skeptical about.

I discovered the power of serving; that it leads to powerful experiences of God's presence; that Jesus breathes his abundant life into us when we serve. And I experienced that the more I worked to give the love, joy, peace, patience, etc away to others, the more of it I experienced in my life.

Several years later, I would pick up a book called The Purpose Driven Church. It was then that I had a model and language to put to truth that experience had been teaching me....that the abundant life...the fullness of life that Jesus invites us into...it doesn't come by waiting for some light to shine on us, or some burning bush to awe us, or by waiting until for God to give us some crystal clear message. I mean, I believe those things happen sometimes. It has happened to me a few times.

But the real experience of abundant life in Christ comes by constantly and consistently applying the purposes of worship, fellowship, ministry, sharing the good news, and growing deeper in our faith.

So if you're here today and you're not in relationship with Jesus, let me encourage you to invite him into your life today, because he will lead you into life in the fullest.

And if you're in a relationship with Jesus, and you're not striving to fulfill the purposes that he has already given us, then stop making the excuse of waiting on a clear message for the purpose of your life...you have 5 of them...get busy, take the next step.

And if like me, you know all of this, but still get side-tracked from time to time and you need something to help you kick it all back in... find the next opportunity you have to serve someone else and just do it.

All of this is just about getting engaged in God's mission; being a branch, using your experiences – pains, struggles, heartbreaks, triumphs. Your unique abilities and the everyday opportunities that God will place in front of you to bear his fruit of love, joy, peace, etc...into the lives of others.

No experience of your past has to be wasted...if you're willing, God will, in time, use all of it – everything that is called YOUR LIFE – to pour HIS LIFE into the LIFE of someone else. And that's why I live...

Prayer.