

CREATED FOR A PURPOSE



You were created by God. You have a purpose.

Everyone wants a purpose for their lives. Finding your purpose, we've been told over and over, is what makes life worth living—what makes life really satisfying. Unfortunately, not all of us get to experience that particular form of satisfaction.

Sadly, our culture often determines a person's value by how much that person can contribute to society—or at the very least, how much that person can avoid becoming a burden to others. If an individual's purpose is not apparent to the rest of the community, they may question his or her very worth as a human being.

God never sees us that way. In fact, every single person on our planet has an inherent value and a specific purpose. That's because every single person on our planet is a human created in the image of God.

As we study the prophet Jeremiah in this session, we'll see the moment when he discovered his God-given purpose. Looking at the call God placed on Jeremiah's life, we'll discover important principles that apply to all of us.

Best of all, we'll see that, regardless of how the world sees us—or how we see ourselves—God has created us for a purpose.



Ron Edmondson

Ron Edmondson pastors Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington, Kentucky, a church full of people whom God “fearfully and wonderfully” made and is using in incredible ways. He admits that his favorite church member is his wife Cheryl. Together they have two sons, a daughter-in-law, and an extremely happy—and spoiled—Yorkiepoo. Ron blogs on leadership, church, and culture at ronedmondson.com.

SPECIAL FOCUS

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*What's the most valuable object
you've touched?*

QUESTION #1

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THE POINT

Before you were born, God designed you with great value.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Our group was conducting a medical clinic and doing street evangelism in a very poor slum outside Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. Unfortunately, several days of fighting between the police and the gangs in the slum had created an intense situation, and the people we came to help were afraid to leave their houses. We made an appeal to the police to allow us to continue our work while keeping those in our group safe.

I will never forget the response of the police officers to our request. One of the officers sneered, “Why would anyone want to help those dogs in that slum?”

My heart had another sobering reaction that day. Outside of my own culture and context, I felt nothing but love for these poor Brazilians. But how many times had I harbored prejudice in my own heart toward someone in my own country who wasn’t exactly like me?

Perhaps most sobering of all was the realization that I know what the Bible teaches. God loves everyone—and He has a unique plan and purpose for each life.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Jeremiah 1:4-5

⁴ **The word of the LORD came to me:** ⁵ **“I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”**

As a prophet, Jeremiah’s forty-year ministry spanned the low point of Judah’s history as a nation. Jeremiah is often called the Weeping Prophet because of his continued grief over the sins of his fellow Israelites. Worse, Jeremiah ministered during the Babylonian conquest of Judah, during which the temple was destroyed and many of his countrymen were taken into captivity.

Despite these factors, Jeremiah knew God’s plan and purpose for his life:

- ▶ **“I chose you before I formed you in the womb.”** The Hebrew word translated “chose” carries the idea of knowing someone and establishing a relationship. God was intimately involved in the course of Jeremiah’s life and development.
- ▶ **“I set you apart before you were born.”** God set Jeremiah apart for a specific purpose even before anyone else could see that purpose—even before he was born!
- ▶ **“I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”** Long before he knew about it, Jeremiah had a specific assignment from God. Surely that was encouraging to remember when he faced discouraging and even threatening times.

More than ever, the world needs to understand that God has a plan for every human life. He has a plan for the unborn. He has a plan for the elderly. He has a purpose for those with physical or mental needs. He has a purpose for those who cannot function without the assistance of others. No human being has any less value to God because of size or ability or race or age.

What makes us valuable as human beings?

QUESTION #2

My parents knew about me almost nine months before I was born, but God knew about me thousands of years before I came into existence. God surely took joy at my birth—the unveiling of His creation. He feels the same way about you!

God has known you longer, and better, than anyone else. He loves you more than you can ever comprehend, and He has an incredible plan for your life.

Jeremiah 1:6-8

⁶ But I protested, “Oh no, LORD, God! Look, I don’t know how to speak since I am only a youth.” ⁷ Then the LORD said to me: “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth,’ for you will go to everyone I send you to and speak whatever I tell you. ⁸ Do not be afraid of anyone, for I will be with you to deliver you. This is the LORD’s declaration.”

Sometimes God’s specific plan for our lives is clear, like it was for Jeremiah. But even when we’re unsure of our path, we can trust that God still has a plan for us. How does He reveal that plan?

- ▶ **God’s plan is found as we seek Him.** It all starts with having a relationship with God. He isn’t hiding from us. He actively wants us to know His will for our lives: “The LORD is near all who call out to Him, all who call out to Him with integrity” (Ps. 145:18).
- ▶ **God’s plan is found as we follow His Word.** So much of what God wants us to do is already revealed in Scripture. God’s will concerning our character is very clear and explicit, and the Bible guides us in how we are to live. When we follow Christ and get our attitudes, ethics, and morals in line with the righteousness of God revealed in Scripture, the specific details of God’s specific plan for us will fall into place.



WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

Imagine you had a friend who made the following comments about the value of human life. Choose one comment and record how you would respond.

"Embryos and fetuses are collections of tissue under development; they're not people."

"I don't see the problem with assisted suicide. People have the right to choose when they die."

"Society needs to be honest about people with severed disabilities—we need to face the fact that some lives are more valuable than others."

What steps can you take to further develop a biblical perspective on the sanctity of life issues affecting our culture?

"Stay far away from a false accusation.
Do not kill the innocent and the just,
because I will not justify the guilty!"

—EXODUS 23:7

Unfortunately, just when we begin to get a clear picture of what God wants us to do, an “excuse machine” often roars to life inside our minds. We find a hundred reasons why we can’t do what God wants us to do.

This happened to Jeremiah in verse 6. He countered God’s plan with two excuses:

1. **“I don’t know how to speak.”** Jeremiah lacked experience as both a leader and a prophet.
2. **“I am only a youth.”** The Hebrew for “youth” covers a broad age range, from a newborn infant to a young man of about 20. Jeremiah was a young man in the community.

Not surprisingly, God didn’t accept these excuses. God knew what He could do through Jeremiah; therefore, the Lord simply repeated His commission to His servant.

God encouraged Jeremiah to “not be afraid of anyone.” Knowing that God had called him to a specific purpose should have lessened Jeremiah’s fear, but God offered something even greater: His own presence. “I will be with you to deliver you.”

Likewise, God is with us as we carry out His purposes. Jesus promised that His Father would send “the Counselor, the Holy Spirit” (John 14:26) to help us. This Holy Spirit—the same Power who raised Jesus from the dead (see Rom. 8:11)—lives in us.

We are never alone.

*What are some
excuses we use for
not doing what God
has called us to do?*

QUESTION #3

Jeremiah 1:9-10

⁹ Then the LORD reached out His hand, touched my mouth, and told me: “I have now filled your mouth with My words. ¹⁰ See, I have appointed you today over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and demolish, to build and plant.”

God has uniquely and wonderfully made each one of us—and God makes no mistakes. He took plenty of time crafting you and me just the way He wants us to be. Whatever challenges and limitations we think we have, God has designed us and equipped us with exactly what we need to bring Him glory.

Jeremiah saw himself as limited: he was young and he didn’t speak well. But God knew better: “The LORD reached out His hand [and] touched my mouth.” God chose Jeremiah to be His prophet, and He equipped Jeremiah with both the words he needed and the ability to speak those words.

God equips each of us as He chooses. Some of us wish we could speak as Jeremiah did. Some of us wish we could lead like Moses. Or write like David. Or do such-and-such like so-and-so. But the world only needed one Jeremiah, one Moses, and one David.

Remember: God gave the world only one Jeremiah. And He has given the world only one you!

Just as God called Jeremiah in a unique way, He equipped Jeremiah in a unique way. God works the same way today: giving each of us a unique way and place to serve and glorify Him in the kingdom of God. He will use you and me for specific purposes and plans—things He has designed and designated for only you and me to complete. We will live more purposeful and fulfilled lives when we avoid comparisons and submit to His purpose for our lives.

No matter how others may see us—or how we see ourselves—God continually shapes us and equips us for His purposes and His glory. No matter who we are or what we’ve done, we can bring glory to God through Christ. We were created for a purpose.

What are some things all Christians are called to do?

QUESTION #4

How has God equipped you to fulfill your purpose?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

How will you respond to the truth that God values you and has created you for a purpose? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Memorize Proverbs 3:5-6.** Write Proverbs 3:5-6 on a card where you will see it often. Every time you read it, pray that God will make clear His path and purpose for you.
- ▶ **Ask for God's direction.** Pray and ask God to show you something specific He wants you to do. It may be as simple as inviting your neighbor to church or Bible study group. Then, watch for an opportunity to obey.
- ▶ **Stand up for others.** Find others in your community—the unborn, the aged, those with physical and/or mental challenges—and work to ensure they are not devalued by society. Help them find their purpose and worth in Christ.



There's no room for hatred or prejudice on our path to follow God and fulfill our purposes in His kingdom. The more you recognize your value in Christ, the more you will lift up the value of others.

My thoughts

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLcreated**



OUR DEBT, OUR WORSHIP

BY ERIC GEIGER

How do you respond when you discover a debt has been paid? Martyn Lloyd-Jones has been credited with wisely articulating that you do not know how to answer that question unless you know how big the debt is.

Perhaps you have enjoyed the experience of someone unexpectedly picking up the bill at a restaurant for you. Or, maybe you have gone through the drive-thru at a coffee shop and reached into your wallet to pay, only to be told by the barista, “The car in front of you has already paid for your bill.” Pretty amazing experience, right?

But because the bill was relatively small, you likely did not bow down in the middle of the restaurant or chase the car down in front of you, pull the driver out of the seat, and pay him homage. You were grateful, but your response matched the size of the debt.

Of course, if someone paid the full balance of your mortgage or promised to cover your rent for life, your response would be different. The size of the debt dictates your response.

Words fail to capture the magnitude of the debt Christ paid for us. We committed holy treason against our holy God and rightly deserved the wrath of God. But Christ, in His great mercy, absorbed the wrath of God in His flesh in our place to make us right with God. He traded His righteousness for our sin and freely forgave us.

Our debt, a debt we could never pay, has been paid by the One we sinned against.

The size of our debt must dictate our response. When we fail to worship the Lord, we are failing to remember who He is and what He has done for us. When the Lord gave the command for Israel to worship Him and Him alone, He reminded them that the foundation of His command for them to worship Him was His rescue of them. God's saving mercy served as the basis for His command to worship: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery. Do not have other gods besides Me" (Ex. 20:2-3).

Later, when the priests in Israel failed to worship God rightly, He sent a prophet named Malachi to confront them on their lackadaisical and dispassionate worship. Three thoughts emerge from reading the confrontation in the first chapter of Malachi.

1. God will be worshiped. Because He is God, He must be worshiped. God will always be worshiped. His name will be great among the nations. "For My name will be great among the nations, from the rising of the sun to its setting. Incense and pure offerings will be presented in My name in every place because My name will be great among the nations," says Yahweh of Hosts" (Mal. 1:11).

Think about it. As you slept last night, another believer on the other side of the world was worshiping God. As that believer is sleeping now, you are reading and reflecting on the greatness of God. There is never a moment when He is not worshiped. Jesus said that the rocks would cry out if the people failed to praise Him. At all times, through all generations, God will be worshiped. God is in the midst of pursuing worshipers from every tribe, tongue, and nation who will worship Him. The scene in heaven has already been determined. There will be people from all nations worshiping Him through all eternity (see Rev. 5:9).

God is pursuing His own worship because there is nothing greater than God for God to pursue. There is nothing more glorious, nothing more beautiful, nothing more holy. If there were something greater than His own glory for God to pursue, then He would cease to be God. But there isn't. Jonathan Edwards wrote that God is "infinitely the greatest and best of beings. All things else, with regard to worthiness, importance, and excellence, are perfectly as nothing in comparison to Him."

2. We will worship. We don't have to be taught to worship. We are always pursuing something to love, something to honor, something to give us worth and meaning. When the Lord confronted the people in Malachi's day, He said of the sacrifices they were offering Him: "Try offering

them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?’ says the LORD Almighty” (Mal 1:8, NIV).

The words could be applied, “If you offered your employer what you offered me, you would lose your job. If you offered your coach what you offered me, you would not be on the team. If you offered your spouse what you offered me, your marriage would not work.” God was observing worship among His people, but it was not worship of Him.

demand us to worship Him, He would be allowing us to seek satisfaction in things that in the end will only deliver misery.

Because He has rescued us and paid our debt, He demands our worship be directed toward Him. Because He will be worshiped and you will worship, His commands for you to worship Him are good and gracious commands.

“Our debt, a debt we could never pay, has been paid by the One we sinned against.”

At all times we worship. We cannot help it. Our worship is often misdirected to temporary things that cannot satisfy, to lesser things that will not quench. When we worship something else, we worship something less.

3. Thus, God’s commands to worship Him are gracious invitations. The Lord confronts His people through Malachi for not worshiping and honoring Him. “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. But if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is your fear of Me?” (Mal. 1:6).

While the rebuke is strong in Malachi, it is also loving and gracious. God’s command to worship is ultimately a gracious invitation. His commands to seek Him, to worship Him, and to honor Him are gracious invitations to worship the only One who can satisfy our hunger and quench our thirst. If He did not confront us in our misdirected worship of “little g” gods that fail to deliver on their promises, He would not be loving and gracious. If He did not



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