

Text: Acts 17:24-28; Luke 12:13-21

Title: “Explore God ... Does Life Have a Purpose?”

Today we’re beginning a series entitled “Explore God.” Each week we will answer a different question that people everywhere ask at some time or the other: **Does Life Have a Purpose? Is There a God? Why Does God Allow Pain and Suffering? Is Christianity Too Narrow? Is Jesus Really God? Is the Bible Reliable? Can I Know God Personally?**

Discussion groups are meeting throughout the week and all over the city. If you want to connect with one this coming week you’ll see details in our worship guide about groups that meet here.

I want to start this morning in Acts 17. So turn there. The very fact that we have questions about God and about life is due to the fact that an eternal God created us. There’s something in us that longs to connect with our Creator. God made us that way. It starts with Him. We will never understand our reason for existing and our purpose for living apart from Him. **Read Acts 17:24-28.**

The invitation from Scripture to “Explore God” is based on the fact that God has made Himself known to us. He is a self-disclosing God. That’s the only way we would ever know anything about Him. And the main way that God reveals Himself to us is in His Son Jesus Christ. He reveals Himself in the universe He created. He reveals Himself in the Scripture. But the most brilliant way He has revealed Himself to us is in His Son Jesus Christ. So as we go through these seven questions, we will find the answer in the person of Jesus Christ. So here’s the ...

Starting point: Our purpose in life is found in God. He has perfectly revealed Himself through His Son Jesus Christ. So we can look to the teachings of Jesus for the answer to the question of our purpose in life.

Now turn in your Bibles to Luke 12:13. One of the big questions that we as human beings ask is, “Does Life Have a Purpose?” Jesus understands that as we see here in these verses. **Read Luke 12:13-21.**

ILLUSTRATION – “Does life have a purpose?” I remember that question haunting me as a teenager before I was saved. At times I was overwhelmed with the thought, “What’s the use?” I didn’t have any sense of purpose or meaning in my life. In those years there was a popular song ... more like a ballad ... entitled “Is That All There Is?” In the song a woman tells the story of her life. When she was a little girl her house caught fire and her father scooped her up and they ran out of the house. And there in her father’s arms she watched her house burn. And when it was all over she asked, “Is that all there is? Is that all there is? If that’s all there is, my friends, then let’s keep dancing. Let’s break out the booze and have a ball.” When she was twelve her father took her to the circus. She saw the animals and the attractions. But as she sat there watching she had the feeling that there was something missing. Is that all there is to a circus? Then there was the sad refrain to the song, “Is that all there is? Is that all there is? If that’s all

there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing. Let's break out the booze and have a ball." Later she fell in love with a wonderful man. They took walks together and gazed lovingly into each other's eyes. They were so in love, but then he left her. And again the sad refrain came: "Is that all there is? Is that all there is? If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing. Let's break out the booze and have a ball." The song ends with this woman saying that she knows that death will come one day. She calls it "the final disappointment." She knows that when she breathes her last breath she will be asking: "Is that all there is? Is that all there is? If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing. Let's break out the booze and have a ball."

The woman in that song knew there had to be more to life, but she never found it. And when you have no purpose in life then you just try to squeeze out as much pleasure as you can before you die.

So how does Jesus answer the question, "Does Life Have a Purpose?" Let me explain these verses to you, then I will come back and show you why getting the right answer to that question is crucial in life. You see, the answer to the question: "Does Life Have a Purpose?" trickles down into every decision that you make and every issue that you face in your life. The issue here has to do with a squabble between two brothers over their inheritance. (Anyone ever seen that happen?) But you'll see that this really isn't about an inheritance, it's about a bigger issue ... what is our purpose in life?

Luke 12:13 - Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

So someone approached Jesus with a thorny issue, and the man was probably surprised at the answer Jesus gave.

Luke 12:14 - Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"

Jesus is saying that His calling is really not to get involved in things like inheritance, but He does have something more important to say. And it comes in the form of a warning, not just to the man but to everyone listening.

Luke 12:15 - Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Jesus knows what was in this man's heart and He knows what's in our hearts. There's a bigger issue at stake here than whether or not the guy was going to get his share in the inheritance. Jesus knows the real issue in this man's life is that he is being deceived about what's most important in life.

In another place Jesus warns about "the deceitfulness of riches" (wealth or money)." This pile of money or land or whatever it was (let's call him Mr. Riches) was lying to the man. Mr. Riches will lie to you. He will say, "If you lose me, you lose your life. Life is nothing without

me. Your life will be boring and empty and meaningless and unhappy without me. So you better get all you can of me, because I am life!” So says Mr. Riches.

So this is why Jesus taught in v.15, “a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” Jesus’ assessment of things is always true. Your life doesn’t consist of having lots of things or pleasures. That’s not the real purpose for life. The real purpose in life has to do with your relationship with God. So Jesus tells them a parable. **Read Luke 12:16-20.**

Notice that the man in the parable is called a fool because he is wasting his life on the wrong purpose. And he is wasting his eternity. And Jesus draws it all together by saying...

Luke 12:21 - “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

“Rich toward God...” – There you have the reason for which we are created. That’s our purpose in life. I’ll show you what that is in a moment. So don’t miss that.

Now is it bad to have your business prosper, or to get a promotion with a pay raise or to have your investments increase in value? No. That’s not what Jesus is teaching here. The man is not a fool because he’s a productive farmer. The Bible tells us that God is the one who gives us the ability to produce wealth. So that’s not the evil thing in his story. No, the man was a fool because he wasted his life thinking that was his main purpose in life. Remember what God said to him?

Luke 12:20 - “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”

Now it would be one thing if the man here in Jesus’ story built bigger barns so that he could be more generous and say, “God is my real treasure, not my stuff.” But no, according to v.19 the way he intends to use his wealth is so that he can say to himself:

Luke 12:19 - “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”

So he’s saying, “My purpose in life is to make a lot of money in order to buy things and pleasures. So my life will be easy and happy. Again, God in the parable says.

Luke 12:20 - “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”

So he’s not going to gain life; he’s going to lose it. And we’re back to v.21.

Luke 12:21 - “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

What does it mean to be rich toward God? It means to show by the way you live your life that God is your ultimate treasure, more than money or the things and pleasures it buys. When we're rich toward God we realize that we were not made for things but for God. And our life doesn't consist in how much stuff we have but how much God we have! So when we're rich toward God our hearts are drawn to God as our true riches.

If the farmer in Jesus' story was truly rich toward God his response to his prosperity and blessing would have been something like this: "God, this is all yours. You have made my fields prosper. Show me how to express with my riches that you are my treasure, and the riches are not. I already have enough. I don't need a bigger and bigger safety net. I don't need better food, better drink, better parties. I do indeed want to make merry, but not in self-indulgent parties with rich retirees. I want to make merry with the people who have been helped by my generosity. I want the fullest blessing of giving. Because you taught me, Lord, it is 'more blessed to give than to receive.'" I love that!

So here's what Jesus recognizes in this man's heart. The real issue in his heart is not that he needs his brother to give him his share of the inheritance. What Jesus sees is that this man is pursuing the wrong purpose in life. He's wants to be rich, but not rich toward God.

You see, it's not just discovering your purpose in life. You may discover that you have been living for the wrong purpose. The big deal is to discover *God's purpose* in life. Why?

DISCOVERING YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE GIVES MEANING TO EVERY DAY.

Since I was saved as a teenager I never had to ask the question again, "Is that all there is?" I found that meaning in Jesus.

DISCOVERING YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE GIVES GUIDANCE IN EVERY DECISION YOU MAKE.

We have to make many decisions of how we will spend our life. Who should I spend time with? Where should I work? How should I spend my money? Either I make those decisions based on a selfish purpose in life or I make them based on God's purpose for my life.

DISCOVERING YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE DETERMINES YOUR ETERNAL DESTINY.

Your purpose in life determines your destiny in eternity. God wants us to find our purpose in a relationship with Himself through His Son Jesus Christ. That's the only way we will be blessed with an eternity filled with *rewards* in His presence. If we miss that and look for purpose in the things and pleasures of this world, then we will face an eternity filled with *regrets* separated from God. Rewards or regrets ... which will it be?

ILLUSTRATION – Let me just use this piece of rope to illustrate what I’m talking about here. Now, imagine this rope just goes on forever. It is a timeline of your existence. It goes on forever. And this red part at this end of the rope represents your time on earth, and the rest goes on millions and millions of years into eternity. So you have a few years on earth, but that’s nothing compared to your existence for eternity. For many of you, your purpose in life is only what happens in this red part. So all you think about is, “I’m going to work hard and make as much money as I can so I can have more things and more pleasures and more trips and maybe have a nice long retirement. I’m going to use my time playing video games or watching movies because that’s what makes me happy here. I’m going to use people to bring me pleasure here because that’s what makes me happy.” But what about the rest of the rope? That means an eternity filled with regrets. Eternity is a long time. However, if I discover that my purpose here in the red zone is to know God through His Son Jesus Christ and to live for His glory, then everything’s different. When I put my trust and my life in God’s hands I have the promise of an eternity filled with rewards, not regrets. Every sin is forgiven forever and I will enjoy the presence of God forevermore. And we have one chance to get this red part right. That determines how and with whom we will spend eternity. This red zone can end at any time for any of us.

Bottom Line: Every person on Earth was created to personally know and love God. Life is meaningless without God, but God gives everything meaning.