

To Take Part in God's Story (Mission)

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[0 : 00] Whatever you set your mind to, you can do it. You can change the world. And so you have this desire to be able to change the world. If, however, you're a parent of a millennial, most likely you're a baby boomer or something like that, your big desire right now is to leave a legacy.

That's all you're thinking about, death. And what's my mark on the world? And you're starting to get kind of depressed and everything like about it. But on the whole, most of us have to come to grips with that is that our individual actions are a bit like stones tossed into a very large lake.

The reality is we are remembered by just a few. And our contribution to humanity is remembered by even less. Most of us have to face the fact that we will drop the little pebble of our lives into the turbulent ocean of world events.

And in no time at all, the surface will bear no trace of our passing. That's kind of depressing, especially if you're a millennial and you're kind of positive right now.

But it is this sense of purposelessness that is one of the chief anxieties of life. What is the purpose of life?

[1 : 17] Big, big anxiety. Big, big anxiety. Big, big anxiety. So if you've just tuned in today, then you've arrived at Vision Sunday. And it's the climax of our Vision series. And this year we've been discovering or rediscovering or aligning ourselves to God's purpose.

We've called this whole series, His Purpose, Our Purpose, My Purpose. In week one, we asked the question, what's the purpose of life? And we saw that God created all things and that He saved us for His glory.

And we used the word magnification to summarize that purpose. In week two, we narrowed it down. What's the purpose of the church, the people that He saved? And we saw that God has gathered us together as a new people, a new humanity for His glory.

We do it together. And we used the word membership to describe that. Week three, we investigated what is God's purpose for us as He's gathered people. And we discovered it was to transform us into the image of His true Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, because God desires to have children in His own image.

And we used the word maturity to summarize all that. So God has created us. He saved us. He's gathered us. He's growing us. And last week, we saw that He's not just growing us, but He's giving us a job to do.

[2 : 36] And that job is to serve Him in the world. And we used the word ministry to summarize all of that. Today, we're looking at what is the work that God has called us to do in His world.

And we're summarizing this with our final M, and that's mission. So I'm up to point number one, what is God's mission? See, one of the ways we discover what is God's mission is to, that is, what is the work that God's doing in the world, is to look at the end of history as God describes it.

Well, you know, therefore the goal of all things. And we can learn our purpose for being just by looking at what is God's goal in all time and eternity. And what we discover, it's kind of like a finish line that we're running towards.

But before we go to the end of all things, let's go back to the beginning of what God's work is in this world. This is God's story. It's His mission, His work in His world.

God's storyline has four main chapters to it. Creation, new creation, for redemption and new creation. So let's look at those four things really quickly.

[3 : 48] This is time and eternity, history, everything, as God sees it. So creation, Genesis 1, is the God who stands outside of all that's created.

The God who always existed from everlasting to everlasting, created all things by speaking them into existence. You see that in Genesis 1 and 2. He made the first people, Adam and Eve, in His

image.

All people from Adam and Eve also bear the image of God. We saw that earlier on in this series. The great American theologian, Jonathan Edwards, wrote a booklet, a paper called A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World.

That's the shortened version. He's much longer versions in terms of the titles. And he says there that the only reason that God would have created us was not to get the cosmic love and joy for relationship.

That is, God wasn't hungering for relationship as some people hunger to be loved by someone so they go and have a baby. It's not that kind of an idea. But the only reason is to share the cosmic love and joy that He already had within Himself in the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[5 : 07] And so the storyline of the Bible contains the only storyline in history where there is a divine creator who creates everything motivated by love.

God's design is to have children in His own image sharing in His perfect relationship. sharing in His perfect love.

So that's creation. Fall. There is solidarity in the image of God. All people bear the image of God, but there's also solidarity in sin. Genesis 3, Adam and Eve reject God.

They decide, well, we want to do things our way. All people have followed suit since Adam and Eve living life with no consideration for God. We assume right from the very beginning that God hasn't got love as His main motive.

That God is not actually ultimately loving. That He's actually holding back on us in some way. He's not giving us everything that we should have. He's put constraints around us and we don't like constraints.

[6 : 19] And because of our special dignity as people made in the image of God, image bearers, God holds us especially accountable in a way that He doesn't hold the rest of the universe accountable.

And we see Him handing His people over for judgment. Judgment in Genesis 3, sorry, Genesis 11, as it is in Genesis 4, is He scatters people from His presence.

Right throughout the Bible, God's judgment is to scatter them away from relationship with Him. So in Genesis 11, He scatters people across the earth. He confuses all of their language so they would not work together and certainly not work together in order to depose God.

So relationship with God and relationship with each other and in fact the created order is deeply fractured because of the fall. Then we've got redemption.

Chapter number 3. But God doesn't just act in judgment. He also has the plan to reverse everything. In Genesis chapter 12, to understand your Bible, you've got 11 chapters and then you've got Genesis chapter 12.

[7 : 25] And Genesis chapter 12 is where the hinge of the Bible, it's where everything hinges here. This is the beginning of the chapter of redemption. This is the turning point of the Bible.

It's the beginning of God's plan of redemption that began with a promise to Abraham that all peoples on earth would be blessed through Abraham. God's intention is to reverse judgment. It's a plan that's worked out through history, finds its culmination in the death and resurrection of Jesus. And this is how Galatians 3 puts it in the New Testament. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed.

You're someone who's inherited his promise and heirs according to the promise. So Jesus takes the judgment of God for our sin upon himself.

[8 : 24] He dies the death that we should have died, but he rises victorious over sin so that everyone who puts their trust in Jesus is now gathered back into relationship with God and to each other.

Jesus forms a new community, a new humanity, a new people for God, new sons and daughters made in the image of God, not just in a physical sense or relational sense, but in a deeply connected sense, doing what our Father wants us to do.

He calls it the church. So all the former divining walls of hostility between God have been broken down as they have also with God. And as a result of Jesus' work of reconciliation, calling people back to each other and back to God, Jesus calls his church to take this good news of reconciliation

through the Lord Jesus to the ends of the earth, making disciples of every nation, people and language.

That is how we take part in God's work, his story, his mission in the world. And if you're sitting here right now, you are currently in chapter three.

We're all in chapter three. But there's a chapter four. And chapter four of God's story is not the end of it. It's actually the beginning of a new story.

[9 : 51] As C.S. Lewis wrote, and I'm going off the top of my head here, C.S. Lewis wrote in his booklet, *The Last Battle Cry*, he said the final chapter is in fact the actual story.

It's like everything to open the final chapter of the book, your whole lives have been waiting for the final chapter to open, and it is a chapter that never closes. Everything is preparation for chapter four.

It's a chapter where God reigns forever. There's no more evil. There's no more sin, carnage. There's no more death. There's no more mourning. There's no more tears.

In Revelation five, we get a glimpse of how Jesus brings history to its final goal. In verse nine, John tells us why Jesus is worthy to open, the book of the end of history, so that things unfold according to the plan of God.

It says, Jesus is worthy because of how his death relates to all peoples of earth. You are worthy to take the scroll, to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

[11 : 09] You have made them to be a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth. You see, the reason Jesus has the right to open the book of history is that by his death, he has ransomed people for God, for the glory of God and the worship of God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

It was God's design in the death of Jesus to ransom some from every kind of race and language and make them into one people, a new kingdom, his much-loved children.

And his much-loved children will have one king over them, that is, they would live with Jesus as their supreme treasure and Lord. Jesus is the one who unites them.

Jesus is the one to whom they live for. And they will all be priests. They will be full-time, this is what we saw last week, they'll be full-time worshippers and servants of Jesus.

Jesus died to ransom subjects for the king and worshippers for the king from every people group in history. All the scattered ones, all the ones once separated from God and from each other are now brought together under the reign of Jesus in finding God's blessing as promised to Abraham.

[12 : 35] And so God's big story, his mission, his work in the world through all time and space is for people to come under the authority of Jesus to turn to him in repentance and faith and receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life and live for the honour of Jesus forever.

That's God's big plan. God's purpose for all things, as revealed in the biblical storyline, is the reason why this church has a purpose statement that says we exist to, we're treasuring Jesus for God's glory and the joy of all peoples.

And this vision series over these five weeks is an attempt to get greater clarity and alignment between, alignment behind God's vision in the world as it's worked out in this church.

How we do it. Okay. That's point one. That's God's mission. That's how he's designed time and eternity.

That's his purposes. Point two is what does it look like to be captured by God's work in the world?

So if you've got someone beside you who's going to sleep right now, give them a loving, gentle, but firm elbow in the ribs.

[14 : 12] If you're distracted by Facebook or by something else, have your moment, turn it off and listen to this. This is so, so important that you get this.

What does it look like to live with God's mission as the driving force of your life? When his first disciples, Jesus walks along, says, hey you, come follow me.

And he calls his first disciples and they drop their nets on the beach and they left their taxation tables. to follow Jesus. He wasn't asking them to come with him on a gap year of travel around the Holy Land.

It wasn't a three year sabbatical. It wasn't a gap year before you head off to university in Jerusalem and study a master's in shepherding or whatever it is they did back in those days.

They signed up for Jesus to reign over the course of their lives. And we see that clearly with the disciples and we see it with the Apostle Paul who I want to take to now.

[15 : 31] So Acts 20 which was just read out to us it's in your service sheet in front of you. In Acts 20 the Apostle Paul gathers the Ephesian elders, the elders from the church at Ephesus together, have a chat with them.

So these verses are first and foremost primarily directed to the leaders of the church but on the whole they're applicable to every disciple. And we see the importance of this chat when you look at verse 25 where it says now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again.

So this is Paul's if you like final final chat. This is the end of his missionary journeys in fact. And as with any final farewells it is the perfect opportunity to talk about what matters actually matter most. In 2010 a dear friend of mine and Natalie's was near death. I went to visit her in hospital for the last time. I knew it was going to be the last time I knew she had literally hours if you know maybe days to live.

when I went and visited her she was slipping in and out of consciousness and I had 10 to 15 minutes you know with her. We didn't talk about the weather.

[16 : 50] We didn't talk about house prices. We didn't talk what was on the front page of the City Morning Herald. We didn't talk trivia at all.

It was straight down to business. I read the Bible to her. That was the most important thing or walked straight in said Yvonne love you let me open the Bible and read before you lose consciousness.

Read the Bible with her. We talked about hope in Christ. We talked about the resurrection of the body and when the opportunity came I talked about what she meant to me and what she meant to my family and vice versa.

We then very quickly planned her funeral and her instructions to me were very very clear. Put Christ on display. don't you dare tell people that I was a good person.

I said no fear of that. She left me with some parting advice. We cried and kissed her, walked away never to see her again in this life.

[17 : 55] So this is this moment for Paul. What matters most to him is key. Now there is so much more that could be gleaned from this passage than what I'm going to look at tonight but I want to focus on something important.

What Paul wants for these Ephesian elders is for them to emulate his life. That's what he says.

I want you to emulate my God's mission shaped life. God's storyline shaped life.

God's work in the world shaped life. I want you to emulate that. And it's not unusual because he said it before 1 Corinthians 11:1 he says follow me as I follow Christ.

You want to know what it looks like to have your life captured by God's mission in the world then you look at me and you watch my life. In verse 24 we see his vision for his life.

[19 : 02] This is what's happened to him ever since he met Jesus. I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me.

And what's the task? I might do the ministry that God has given me. What's this ministry? The task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. That's the mission.

My mission in life is to do God's mission in life. The gospel of God's grace is what turned Paul's life upside down and inside out.

This is the guy who once described himself as the chief of sinners, a blasphemer, a persecutor of the Lord Jesus and his church. He consented to the murder and the beatings and the false imprisonments. Jesus rescued him from all of that miraculously, from all the guilt and the condemnation that went with that life of wickedness.

He was forgiven. His debt was wiped clean. He was set free. He's made right with God. He's been gathered back into relationship with God. He's been given eternal life all by grace.

[20 : 14] God's favor rested on him. God's sin. How's that possible? Verse 28, the church of God which he bought with the blood of his own.

The Lord Jesus shed his blood for the sins of the world. And it is the act that changes the course of history and that changed the course of Paul's life.

Paul was included in God's mission of redemption. And being captured by God's mission he was able to say I consider my life worth nothing to me.

If only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord has given me. You see the pattern of Paul's life ever since becoming a Christian was commitment to Christ that superseded self interest. He had a job to do. He's preoccupied with something better than life itself in the Lord Jesus. He's not being reckless. He's not being irresponsible. He's not being suicidal when he says that he considers his life worth nothing.

[21 : 34] He is simply saying that Jesus is greater than my career, than my ministry, than my success, than my money, my possessions, my holidays, my children, my body, my significance, my fulfillment, my preservation, my life.

The same commitment was beautifully evident in the life of one Iranian pastor who was imprisoned on charges of apostasy in 1984.

He was on death row for nine years before he finally got his day in court. On the 3rd December 1993 he wrote a defense to the Sari Court of Justice and this is part of what he wrote.

He summarized his life with these words. I'm a Christian. As a sinner I believe Jesus has died for my sins on the cross and by his resurrection and victory over death has made me righteous in the presence of the holy God.

In response to this kindness he has asked me to deny myself and be his fully surrendered follower and not to fear people even if they should kill my body.

[22 : 45] Life for me is an opportunity to serve him and death is a better opportunity to be with Christ therefore I'm not only satisfied to be in prison for the honor of his holy name but I'm ready to give my life for the sake of Jesus my Lord and enter his kingdom sooner the place where the elect of God enter everlasting life.

Finally the charges of apostasy were removed he was released from prison in 1994 but what was not removed was the death sentence.

Three days after being released from prison he was abducted murdered and his body was thrown in a park. See Paul's vision shaped life is on full display he's saying by my life I'm showing you that my life is caught up in God's story the story of my life is caught up in God's story of the world he says in verse 18 you know how I lived the whole time I was with you I served the Lord with great humility and with tears although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews and then down in verse things humility humility honesty honesty industry hard work meeting needs generosity characterized his life and verse 20 is the work that he especially labored hard in again you know again guys look at me you know that

I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house, I have declared to both Jews and Greeks, in other words, everyone, that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

And so Paul's mission-shaped life meant he discharged his duty to make the good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ be known to all.

[25 : 20] In fact, so thoroughly was his discharging of this duty that he says in verse 26, In other words, I have not failed to discharge that duty.

See, in the gospel of the Lord Jesus, Paul discovered a greater treasure than himself. And it resulted in a gospel-shaped life, both in its authenticity and in its attention to focus on proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ from a heart of love and acts of service.

And so, having said that, the apostle Paul left the Ephesian elders. He sailed off to keep giving his life to God's mission.

He was arrested in Jerusalem, as he knew he would be. And by the providence of God, he ended up being transferred to Rome under God. He's like, he's gone to head office now.

And the final two verses of the Acts of the Apostles says this.

[26 : 42] You know, like, now that he's arrested, has he lost his focus? Here's the final two verses. For two whole years, Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.

Boldly and without hindrance, he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. Right to the very end.

Although he's bound by house arrest, what this is saying here is that the word of God wasn't. This servant of the gospel of the Lord Jesus will soon lose his life, but the gospel will keep on advancing to the ends of the earth.

Paul will be dead, but Jesus is still alive. And when we commit ourselves to the Lord Jesus and his gospel, we are committing to God's unstoppable, eternal purposes. The ripple effects of God's mission will only grow in magnitude for all of eternity. Who would have thought that 2,000 years later, we would be talking about the apostle Paul in a country that he never knew existed.

[28 : 00] You want impact for your life? There's impact. You want to leave a legacy? There's a legacy. In the past couple of weeks, you've potentially seen in the media about a young American missionary, 26 years of age, went to North Centauri Islands in the Indian Ocean and was killed.

Just nod your head if you've seen that. I have seen secular media just cane this guy.

What an idiot throwing his life away like that. I've seen Christians saying exactly the same thing. What a waste of life. Is it?

We Christians have got a tendency to say the same thing as the world. And we don't learn from history. In the 1800s, two men went to a place called New Hebrides, which is now called Vanuatu. John Williams and James Harris. First two missionaries out of the London Missionary Society got on a boat, went to the New Hebrides, walked on a beach, and within 10 minutes of walking on the beach, both of them were clubbed to death.

[29 : 29] They were cooked and eaten before the ship had pulled anchor and left. You go back to the church in Scotland where they came from and they said, what a wasted life. Two young men, lives are gone.

What a wasted life. Within 15 years, a man named John Patton said, I'll be the next. John Patton goes down there and the church in Scotland said, don't do it, don't do it, they'll eat you.

Patton walked onto the beach and after 30 odd years of ministry, the whole island of Inewa was converted. And today, 60% of Vanuatu declares itself to be Christian.

And John Patton says, the way was opened by God through the blood of two men. And I've just mentioned John Williams and James Harris who are still known in the history books, who still leave a lasting legacy even though their lives were cut short.

Who knows what God is going to do in the North Sentinelese Islands as he by his Holy Spirit could convict people for the atrocity they've committed against another human being.

[30 : 52] We don't know. And the only reason you would say that life's a wasted life is because you've been captured by a different story.

See, God's story, his mission in the world is what I've just said. But there's another story that's arisen in the last couple of hundred years and it's taken up residence in the soul of the Western world.

And it's becoming more and more dominant and it's very dominant now. It's become the purpose of life for much of the Western world and the technical term for it is philosophical naturalism.

That's a fancy name for materialism. And it's worth comparing the story of philosophical naturalism which is in our lifeblood in this society to God's story.

This is a three-chapter story. Philosophical naturalism, materialism is a three-chapter story. It goes like this. Big bang, evolution, nothing. In the big bang, there's no supernatural or spiritual power.

[32 : 14] There's no creator. There's nothing that rules the physical universe. Everything that can be seen and measured is a, which is the only thing that exists, only things that can be seen and measured is a result of an explosion that appeared out of nothing billions of years ago.

That's chapter one. Random. Boom. Boom. Chapter two. Is that this earth, which is a result of that boom, is in exactly the right place, revolving around the sun at exactly the right speed in order for life to evolve.

Against all the odds, humanity has evolved from prehistoric soup to be the dominant species on the earth for the time being.

And despite what people might think, despite what they might feel, there is no such thing as absolute right or wrong. If you happen to feel that there is an absolute right or wrong, it's because there's a chemical reaction in your brain as a result of evolution.

But you've just got to ignore that because it's just not true. Because everything is an accident and it's random, then there is no absolute purpose in life.

[33 : 43] You can create purpose for life. You can create your own purpose if you want to, but that's something that you have created as a finite being. And that's what you'd need in order to exist in life, then that's fine, but it's not real.

And so, that means that this life is all you have, make the most of it, and the goal of this life is for you to be as happy as you possibly can be.

And to be as happy as you possibly can be, you must consume experiences and accumulate things. And the reason you must do that is because chapter three is there.

And it could happen at any time. The sun is just going to burn up. We're going to slip our axis and spin off into the Netherlands.

Humanity will become extinct. There's no form of afterlife. There's no survival of the conscience.

The story of materialism is that this life is it.

[35 : 03] Which is why when a 26-year-old throws his life away, we go, what an idiot. We call that a wasted life.

Where materialism says everything is random, there's no good or evil, there's nothing to hope for, the biblical storyline is that we have a loving creator who has triumphed over evil at great cost to himself to love you dearly.

And we look forward to a day when everything that's wrong is going to be made right. And we will live with him in blissful joy for all of eternity. I've got to tell you, the biblical storyline just seems so much more compelling.

And it's not just compelling. If you're not convinced by it, it is true and I can show you how it's true. I can tell you that it is more reasonable than every other of the grand narratives that are out there. And if you're not a Christian, I'd invite you to jump on board with this and start investigating the claims of Jesus and his worldview today.

[36 : 17] But here's the thing. Philosophical naturalism or God's biblical storyline, whichever one you choose, it will require demand of you, your time, your talents, and your treasures.

Whichever one you serve, you're serving it. And that's why I'm calling you today to serve the biblical.

Don't keep a foot in both worlds. I'm calling you to jump on board with God's storyline. One of the things we're doing practically tonight is pledging.

We do this every year. One of the things that I do is I declare what Natalie and I and the kids are giving to this mission in this church.

And staff and parish council follow me. I get this from 1 Chronicles 29. I've written about this a number of times. Staff and parish council follow me and then I invite the rest of you to follow. For next year, Natalie and I are giving \$350 a week to God's mission in St. Paul's.

[37 : 34] Our giving to poor and mission is on top of that. Staff and parish council have in this week followed suit and they have pledged \$3,823 per week between them.

That's 40%, almost 40% of our target that we're hoping to reach just from staff and parish council. They've also contributed \$16,170 to our 50,000 project for our local mission project for our next gen ministries.

That's 30% that's been raised from parish council and staff and they have contributed \$2,450 towards the Ropes Crossing Global Mission Project.

Staff and parish council have put 50% towards that one already. What I'm calling you to do is to play your part in God's mission and to do it on purpose here.

God's mission is to overthrow Satan gathering people to himself through the Lord Jesus so that they might live forever in his presence as his much-loved children.

[38 : 39] God's plan is to gather children to himself to be in the likeness of his true son the Lord Jesus remember he tribe, language, nation and people. How do you purposely play your part in God's mission in this world?

Very simply by surrendering your time, your talents and your treasures to the cause of Christ in such a way that it makes Jesus look magnificent. It makes your life look like it is out of step with philosophical naturalism.

We don't live for that. We live for this. And it means things like as we pull in the whole series together, we grow up in the character of the Lord Jesus so that our motive to see God glorified is love and our actions are service of others.

We pray that God will open the eyes and transform hearts that people might see the beauty and the glory and the worth of Christ. We proclaim the good news that Jesus died for sins.

He's risen triumphant over all evil and reign supreme as Lord of all. And we do it together as his people. We do it by supporting what God has been doing and is doing at the moment around the

world.

[39 : 51] We do it wherever God has placed us as his ambassadors in societies. We heard from Coe earlier about being at school. I want to ask you as we come to the end of this series, how have you been going with your My Purpose Health Checkup?

What is the next step? Don't just sit here and absorb and absorb and absorb but don't do anything. What is the next step you need to take? I plead with you not just sit comfortable.

Is it a crawl? Is it a walk? Is it a run? Do you need to take the first step in fact and start following Jesus tonight? Do you need to increase the regularity that you have at church? Do you need to prepare your heart for corporate worship so that you don't just turn up when the music starts but you're actually ready to engage to sing, to pray, to listen to God, to engage with others?

Do you need to join a community group? Do it. Sign up at the table tonight. Do you need to start serving and join a ministry team? Sign up at the table tonight. Do you need to take further steps towards radical generosity with your resources?

Do that tonight. Do you need to start praying for someone to know the truth and for opportunities for you to speak the truth? Do you need, first of all, just to learn what the truth is and how to speak it well?

[41 : 09] What is the next step? That your life might be on purpose, aligned to God's purpose, to God's story?

What do you need to do to take the next step to jump into God's storyline and find real impact, real legacy?