

“Is God’s Goal, My Goal?”
September 7, 2008
Dr. Jerry Nelson

Do you know anyone who has died that you believe is now in heaven?
Given what they now know, if they could speak to you today about what is most important in life, what do you think they would say? (Idea from the discussion questions of chapter 6 of The Purpose Driven Life)

Look both ways before crossing the street?

Hug your kids today?

Buy gold?

Take time to smell the roses?

That may all be good advice, but do you think that is what they would say is most important? What would they say?

From their new perspective do you think they would, instead, talk about your relationship with God?

If you are not a true Christian, I think they would want to talk to you about receiving God’s gift of forgiveness and an everlasting relationship with him by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

But if you are a Christian, trusting in Jesus, what then do you think they would say?

Read your Bible and pray?

Obey the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule?

Again, that is all good advice but is that what they would say?

I think that from their new perspective they’d want to talk to you about how you are living your life; maybe even more importantly “why” you are living your life – what you are living for?

Remember that funny monologue comedian Billy Crystal made famous in one of his movies?

Crystal was invited to his son's 6th grade class on Careers Day to tell them about his job... which in his case was a job beyond boring! In the middle of telling them what he does... his voice trails off... as he realizes how pointless his life is...and then when prompted by the teacher to continue... he stares off into space... and this is what comes out of his mouth:

*“ Value this time in your life kids.... Cause this is the time in your life when you still have your choices - and it goes by so fast!
When you're a teenager you think you can do anything... and you do.*

Your 20's are a blur!

*30'syou raise your family
You make a little money
And you think to yourself...."what happened to my 20's ???"*

*40's - you grow a little pot belly
You grow another chin
The music starts to get too loud
One of your old girlfriends from high school becomes a grand mother!*

*50's - you have a minor surgery
You'll call it a procedure... but it's a surgery*

*60's - you'll have a MAJOR surgery
The music is STILL loud
but it doesn't matter because you can't hear it ANYWAY*

*70's - you and the wife retire to Fort Lauderdale
You start eating dinner at 2 o'clock in the afternoon
You have lunch around 10
Breakfast the night before
You spend most of your time wandering around malls, looking for the ultimate soft yogurt
And muttering " how come the kids don't call;?"*

*Your 80's you'll have a MAJOR stroke
You end up babbling to some Jamaican nurse whom your wife can't stand
but whom you call MAMA*

Any questions???

It seems that every stage of life has unique challenges and calls forth different questions.

What am I living for? What am I striving to accomplish? What are my goals?

I grant you that I don't think young children think so philosophically; they seem to think little further than what they will do that day.

But by adolescence we do begin to ponder the questions of life and we do begin to live by goals.

In adolescence the goals of independence, college and job begin to take shape.

In our 20s and 30s the goals of getting married, starting a career, and having a family become dominant.

By our 40s and 50s we are into maximizing the career, acquiring "stuff", launching our children into life, and trying to learn what life will be like with just the kids' father or mother around.

By our 60s it is about positioning ourselves for retirement financially and knowing what life after career will look like.

In our 70s among other things, it is about preserving our retirement, having enough to see us through.

In our 80s it is about health and mortality.

Those are mostly legitimate, healthy, even necessary goals.

But somewhere along the way, hopefully earlier rather than later, we realize they are temporary goals.

And like Billy Crystal we realize that unless there is something bigger, something outside of ourselves, all those stages of life simply end, and it all seems so hollow.

Is there anything that transcends these goals; anything that ties them all together; anything that makes sense of them and gives permanence to our lives?

That begs the question: Is life mere chance? Are we simply the products of blind fate? Does history have no beginning and no end?

Some would say “that’s right.”

But as one author responded: “If there is no God, man is lost in a labyrinthine maze of bewildering experiences with no thread of meaning to guide him. If God has not acted in history, the ebb and flow of the tides of the centuries wash back and forth aimlessly between the sands of eternity.”

(Ladd, The Gospel of the Kingdom, 132)

Is that it or can sense be made of life?

Is there a purpose behind it all?

The Bible says “yes.”

The Bible gives us a big picture, a meta-narrative; a comprehensive story of time and eternity.

The Bible explains this life in its larger context

It speaks of a God who is there; a God who created, sustains and controls the outcome of history. It speaks of a God who is working a plan.

That God stands outside of, above, creation and history but is intimately involved in it.

In fact the Bible tells the story of our world, our existence, in four major chapters: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Eternity

The first two parts (creation and fall) are told quickly in the first three chapters of the first book of the Bible, Genesis, and the last part (eternity) is described only briefly in the latter part of last book of the Bible, Revelation.

Most of the Bible speaks to God's plan to redeem his creation from the effects of the Fall – from the consequences of our sinfulness and our sin – our sins of rebellion against God or disregard of God; our sins of selfishness and neglect of others; even our sins of injustice and cruelty.

God's goal for his creation is the redemption of the world and redemption of the crown of his creation, humanity.

The redemption of humanity begins with justification: Jesus said, John 3:3 "I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again."

That redemption continues with sanctification – Romans 12:2 "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind and Galatians 4:19 "until Christ is formed in you."

That redemption is completed with glorification – 1 John 3:2 "But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

But my own or your own individual relationship with God is not God's full purpose.

Listen to the Bible: 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ **and gave us the ministry of reconciliation**: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in

Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And **he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.** ²⁰ **We are therefore Christ's ambassadors,** as though God were making his appeal through us.

God has called us to be part of what he is doing.

God is redeeming his creation.

That is our purpose in this life!

From other texts of Scripture, hear what God is doing and what then is our transcendent purpose in this life.

Ephesians 5:25-27 "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and **to present her** to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

1 Peter 3:18 "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, **to bring you to God.**

2 Corinthians 4:14 "We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and **present us** with you in his presence.

Colossians 1:22 "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death **to present you** holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation...

Jude 1:24 "To him who is able to keep you from falling and **to present you** before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—

2 Corinthians 11:2 "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, **so that I might present you** as a pure virgin to him.

Colossians 1:28 "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, **so that we may present everyone** perfect in Christ.

Do you see the scene in heaven?

We reach the end of our lives here on earth and we stand before God.

God asks, "How did you spend your life accomplishing my purpose?"

"Who do you have to present to me?"

It looks like Jesus' parable of the man who gave his servants some money to invest for him while he was away.

The man expected his servants to invest in ways that would give him a return on his money.

Or to say it differently, he expected his servants to do what he would have done.

To us has been granted the stupendous privilege of living our lives for what will last for eternity.

To us has been granted the privilege of partnering with God in his transcendent redeeming work.

It is tragic when our perspectives are no broader than our careers, our acquisitions or our kids' happiness or our own.

Have we become so preoccupied with the present that we can't see the forest for the trees?

What does cooperating with God in his redeeming work look like?

When I read the Bible I see that God is in the process of redeeming our souls but also our bodies and also the rest of the created world around us.

As I said earlier, he redeems our souls by justification, sanctification and glorification – by causing us to be born again by his grace, by causing us to grow in that grace to be more like Christ and eventually, when we see Jesus face to face, being truly like him.

The Bible also teaches that God will redeem our bodies.

According to 1 Corinthians 15 and other passages, when Jesus comes again our dead bodies will be raised from the grave and given a perfection and immortality that will join with souls forever.

There are implications in this for the way we treat our bodies now and even the way we treat the dead body. But that discussion is for another time.

The Bible also teaches that God will redeem this earth.

The Apostles Peter and John give us the most information on this describing how, when Jesus comes again, God will completely remake the heavens and earth – the new heavens and earth described every so briefly in Revelation.

There are implications here also for the way we treat the environment, this first creation of God's, but that too is for another discussion.

But the redemption that I focus on primarily today is that redemption of our souls, the redemption of God's people.

So again the question is asked, "What does cooperating with God in his redeeming work look like?"

Certainly it includes attending to my own relationship with God.

I can't influence those around me with what I don't have.

Are you reading and meditating on God's Word; are you praying not just for your own protection and provision but also for God's purposes in the world?

If I remember it correctly someone once said there are two things you can't do alone – be married and be a Christian.

Do you need to join a small group Bible Study or find some other way to engage God's Word with God's people?

Having said that, I fear that some will assume Christianity is nothing more than knowing the Bible and living an adequately moral life.

I find that some think, “If I’m not too bad, if I work hard at not swearing, or lusting or cheating, if I fix myself sufficiently to be relatively pleased with my conduct compared to many others then I can know that I’m okay. And then I can spend the rest of my energy, my money and my time as I please.”

But Christianity doesn’t stop with our personal morality.

I like the story about the shoe factory.

One day the manager was taking a friend through the factory showing him the state-of-the-art technology, the expertly trained employees, the newest facilities, and the finest raw materials.

The friend finally asked if he could see some of the shoes.

The manager replied, “Oh, we haven’t made any shoes.”

In the OT God didn’t just say to walk humbly with your God, he also said to act justly and love mercy.

Micah 6:8 “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

In the NT God didn’t say just to keep oneself from being polluted by the world, he also said to look after the poor and disenfranchised.

James 1:27 “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world

And Jesus said the greatest command is not just about loving God but also about loving your neighbor.

Matthew 23:36-39 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”³⁷ Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

And so cooperating with God in his redeeming work has to do with doing!
So how are you actually influencing people that they may be presented to God?

One author wrote, “A friend told me about a woman who was overwhelmed with the love of Jesus and wanted to do something for his kingdom. She was blind and 70 years of age and didn’t think her contribution could be very significant. She was uneducated but she went to a missionary with her French Bible and asked him to underline John 3:16 in red. The missionary was intrigued to know what she would do with it. The woman took her Bible and sat in front a boy’s school in the afternoon and when school as dismissed she would call to a boy or two asking them to read the verse she had underscored in red. They would and then she would ask if they understood what it meant. When they said they did not, she would proceed to tell them the story of Jesus. Over the next several years, 24 young men became pastors due in part to the work of this blind woman who wanted to present someone to Jesus. Paraphrased from Maxie Dunnam (Communicator’s Commentary Galatians, Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, 363)

What does cooperating with God in his redeeming work look like?

It looks like Phil and Carol Love and their years of countless acts of mercy to neighbors, friends and some to other Christians.

It looks like Johnny and Ricki Hein and the time and love they invest in the girls in prison right here behind our church.

It looks like Joe and Dorothy Davidson who for years, when their health allowed, provided equipment and encouragement week after week for the families whose loved ones were on dialysis in a local hospital.

It looks like the many of you who pray for, love and teach our children and youth week after week in Sunday School and small groups.

(See the story below of D.L. Moody’s Sunday school teacher.)

This isn’t just “do-good”ism; this is about God’s work and our work – the work of redemption.

It is 26-year-old Catherine Rohr, a NY private equity investor who with her husband gave up their jobs, moved to Texas to begin a ministry to men and women in prison. It is called the Prison Entrepreneurship Program, teaching prisoners how to use their motivations and skills toward good ends.

It's 50-year-old Bob Muzikowski who driving past vacant lots on his way to work in downtown Chicago, determined to start the Near North Little League for the children of Cabrini-Green – an infamous near-ghetto on Chicago's near-north side. (C.T. September, 2008 pages 24-34)

Ask yourself today – where am I investing in the work that God is doing in this world – who will I present to God?

Our ministry fair today is designed to assist you in determining how to invest yourself in the Kingdom work that God is doing in the world.

These ministries are not the only ways to do that.

There is a world of opportunity around us – the only question is will we take up God's work and make it our own?

We are in league with the Creator and Redeemer himself.

No lesser goal is worthy of your life and worthy of God's greatness.

How can we continue to spend ourselves on what is ultimately unimportant, to what is even counter-productive to God's goals?

John Piper has written, "I will tell you what a tragedy is. I will show you how to waste your life. Consider this story from the Reader's Digest: A couple 'took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30-foot trawler, play softball and collect shells...'

Picture them before Christ at the great day of judgment: 'Look, Lord. See my shells.' That is a tragedy." (From the back cover of *Don't Waste Your Life* the 2003 Crossway publisher's hardbound edition)

Who will you present to God?

Additional Notes:

God is in the process of redeeming his creation and he has called us to be part of that redeeming work. That creation includes our souls, our bodies and the rest of the physical universe. How do we cooperate with God in the redemption of our bodies and the rest of the physical universe?

We are concerned about our own physical bodies and the physical bodies of others, not because we think our present bodies will last forever (we know they will weaken and die) but because we are stewards of the gift of physical life and we want these bodies to be healthy and capable to hear and respond to the gospel and be able to influence those around us for Christ and his kingdom.

We are concerned about the environment. We don't treat it like rental property that we are abandoning. Again, not because we think this present world will last forever (we know that it will be burned up in the end, ushering in a new physical universe) but because God has made us stewards of this earth and we want a safe environment in which people can thrive and live out the lives God gives them for their good and his glory.

We are concerned about mercy and justice in our communities and in the world because it reflects the mercy and justice of God and gives people the opportunity to live as God intended and it gives opportunity for people to learn about the God of mercy and justice.

We are concerned about culture (art, literature, customs, laws and music) because we want truth and beauty to flourish reflecting the truth, beauty and creativity of God, that people can come to know that God and reflect his truth, beauty and creativity in their own lives.

And we are concerned about people, especially people individually, because we want them to live and thrive especially so they may know, love and serve God now and for eternity.

The God-ordained way for this to be manifested in the world is for God's people to live it out.

In the OT, God called a people, Israel, out of the culture, out of the environment they were in and set them apart to create a new environment and a new culture. He gave them laws by which to care for their land, for others and for each other. God's intention was to bless the world through them – to create a new culture of justice, mercy, beauty and truth that would attract the rest of the world to the God who made it happen.

In the NT, God has called a people, his church, to create a new culture of love, mercy, justice, truth and beauty that is so powerfully lived out in their own midst and is so persuasively lived out in their interactions with the existing culture that the world is attracted to the God who made it happen.

<http://www.biblebelievers.com/moody/05.html>

DWIGHT L. MOODY was one of the world's great evangelists preaching to tens of thousands in the late 1800s. He founded orphanages, schools, churches and much more.

He was not the boy to forget his compact with his uncle. He went to church every Sunday-- because he had promised to go. - attending the Mount Vernon Congregational Church, of which the Rev. Dr. E. N. Kirk was pastor. He always considered this to be a great church.

Dr. Kirk was an excellent preacher, but young Moody was at a stage where all sermons sounded alike to him. Frequently he would fall asleep during service, at least until an occasion when he was suddenly awakened from his complete repose by a stern-faced deacon, who, as he roused the lad from his slumbers, pointed to Dr. Kirk, who was preaching - as much as to say, " Keep your eyes on him! " Thereafter Dwight remained awake. Moreover, for lack of something else to do, he began to listen to the sermons. For the first time in my life," he said in later days, "I felt as if the preacher were preaching altogether at me."

HIS FIRST ACQUAINTANCE WITH MR E. D. KIMBALL

One Sunday the young man appeared in the Sunday school of Mount Vernon Church. The superintendent, Mr. Palmer, to whom he gave his name, took him to the class taught by Mr. Edward D. Kimball, and he took his seat among the other boys. Says Mr. Kimball, " I handed him a closed Bible and told him the lesson was in John. The boy took the book and began running over the leaves with his finger away at the first of the volume looking for John. Out of the corners of their eyes the boys saw what he was doing and, detecting his ignorance glanced slyly and knowingly at one another, but not rudely. I gave the boys just one hasty glance of reproof. That was enough - their equanimity was restored immediately. I quietly handed Moody my own book, open at the right place, and took his. I did not suppose the boy could possibly have noticed the glances exchanged between the other boys over his ignorance, but it seems from remarks in later years that he did, and he said in reference to my little act in exchanging books that he would stick by the fellow who had stood by him and had done him a turn like that."

This Sunday school teacher was not one of the ordinary type. Mere literal instruction on Sunday did not satisfy his ideal of the teachers duty. He knew his boys, and, if he knew them, it was because he studied them, because he became acquainted with their occupations and aims, visiting them during the week. It was his custom, moreover, to find opportunity to give to his boys an opportunity to use his experience in seeking the better things of the Spirit. The day came when he resolved to speak to young Moody about Christ, and about his soul.

JUST READY FOR THE LIGHT

I started down town to Holton's shoe store," says Mr. Kimball. "When I was nearly there, I began to wonder whether I ought to go just then, during business hours. And I thought maybe my mission might embarrass the boy, that when I went away the other clerks might ask who I was, and when they learned might taunt Moody and ask if I was trying to make a good boy out of him. While I was pondering over it all, I passed the store without noticing it. Then when I found I had gone by the door, I determined to make a dash for it and have it over at once. I found Moody in the back part of the store wrapping up shoes in paper and putting them on shelves. I went up to him and put my hand on his shoulder, and as I leaned over I placed my foot upon a shoe box. Then I made my plea, and I feel that it was really a very weak one. I don't know just what words I used, nor could Mr. Moody tell. I simply told him of Christ's love for him and the love Christ wanted in return. That was all there was of it. I think Mr. Moody said afterward that there were tears in my eyes. It seemed that the young man was just ready for the light that then broke upon him, for there at once in the back of that shoe store in Boston the future great evangelist gave himself and his life to Christ."

Many years afterward Mr. Moody himself told the story of that day. When I was in Boston," he said, "I used to attend a Sunday school class, and one day I recollect my teacher came around behind the counter of the shop I was at work in, and put his hand upon my shoulder, and talked to me about Christ and my soul. I had not felt that I had a soul till then. I said to myself This is a very strange thing. Here is a man who never saw me till lately, and he is weeping over my sins, and I never shed a tear about them.' But I understand it now, and know what it is to have a passion for men's souls and weep over their sins. I don't remember what he said, but I can feel the power of that man's hand on my shoulder to-night. it was not long after that I was brought into the Kingdom of God.'