

... a traveler's experience through The Purpose Driven Life...

daily ponderings for the 40 days

by Mark Foster

## Day 1

### It All Starts with God

*"Unless you assume a God, the question of Life's purpose is meaningless." - Bertrand Russell, atheist*

It's not about me... This is probably the single most disturbing thought in today's culture. Everything is about me. Television's reality shows put me in a fantasy world with regular people, just like me. When I shop, people cater to my desires. Even Burger King says, I can have it my way. But, my purpose in life is not centered around me.

Even as a christian, that's hard to grasp hold of. It's even harder to follow through with. But that's where this book should provide some good tools for helping me remember that it isn't about me.

I'll admit that on my own quest to know who God is, and what He wants from me, has at times been more of a search for "Who am I?" and "How do I fit into the big picture?" But like Rick points out, that strategy is doomed. I am made for God and to be used for His purpose; He wasn't made for me.

Most of us have a desire to attain some level of success. That's a pretty fair assumption. But Rick points out that success can be totally independent from purpose. I agree that we can become successful, by cultural standards, without finding our purpose in life. What scares me about that, is the potential for missing that purpose, because I stop before God does. For instance, a good communicator may make a huge difference in people lives by teaching/leading/facilitating a small group. That person may find fulfillment in that act. But maybe that person's purpose was to preach, or become a missionary in the local coffee house to the growing post-christian population in urban america. Am I willing to continue my quest when purpose appears to have been found?

*It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone. (Ephesians 1:1, MSG)*

I like to think of it like this: I'm strapped into a parachute, standing at the door of an airplane at 10,000 feet. It's up to me to jump, but where I land is somewhat out of my control. The chute may or may not open. I may be able to guide my landing into the desired area, but maybe not. But nothing is going to happen until I jump. So my real question should be, "Am I supposed to be a skydiver today?"

Rick points out that we discover our identity and purpose through our relationship with Christ. He goes on to say that God's got this eternal plan that we fit into and that our place in that plan was thought out long before we came to be. That leads me to believe that I should feel some responsibility towards others coming after me in this big eternal plan. What are the ripple effects of me not realizing my purpose and acting on it?

**Question to Consider:** *In spite of all the advertising around me, how can I remind myself that life is really about living for God, not myself?*

I think God does a pretty good job of advertising for His cause every day; we just fail to make the translation. Watch a sunrise (as if I'm awake), a sunset, or the flowers open as the sun's light makes its connection. If we can find God in our surroundings, it's much easier to remember that there is a bigger thing going on in this world than our own personal lives. And if we can remember that, then maybe we can push on towards fulfilling the purpose God chose to create us for.

- mark

## Day 2

### **You Are Not an Accident**

*"God doesn't play dice." - Albert Einstein*

Psalm 138:8 tells me *"The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me."* That basically tells me two things in a Matrix sort of way. First, God has complete faith that I will end up right where he designed me to be. And secondly, potentially not as glamorous, my purpose may not include looking great in the context of today's culture.

God made me and has a plan for my life. He made you and has a plan for yours too. I hold this as a foundational belief - just like most Americans that are over the age of 30. Unfortunately, this belief has not, and is not, being passed on to the younger generations today. Without this foundation, it creates the same environment that our missionaries have encountered in foreign lands. I read a stat the other day that said America has become the largest, English-speaking, mission field on the globe.

The second point, like I mentioned yesterday, relates to the tie between finding success and purpose. Rick points out that God's purpose factors in all aspects of our lives individually and together - we fulfill his plan, we don't alter it when we screw up. And if that's true, then one would conclude that a God created some to find him, walk with him, and spend eternity in heaven; while others were created to ignore him and spend eternity in his absence. But I find a flaw in that thinking.

Jeremiah 29:11 tells us: *For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.*

If God plans to give me a future and a hope, then he must plan for me to find him; because without him, there is no hope.

*Colossians 1:27 "Christ in you, the hope of glory."*

I'm not going to pretend that I understand why some people join into a relationship with God and others do not. I don't understand why an all knowing creator, who would desire nothing more than time with his creation, would allow a person to be born knowing that when their life comes to an end, he will not enjoy their company for the rest of eternity. That's on my list of questions to ask someday... Maybe people see more of me than they do of him and that's why they would choose to pass him over...

**Question to Consider:** *I know that God uniquely created me. What areas of my personality, background, and physical appearance am I struggling to accept?*

- mark

### Day 3

#### **What Drives Your Life?**

*"The man without a purpose is like a ship without a rudder - a waif, a nothing, a no man."* - Thomas Carlyle

Everyone's life is driven by something... several things jumped out of this chapter to me, but I'm going to focus in on one. Rick states, "Without a clear purpose you have no foundation on which you base decisions, allocate your time, and use your resources."

I've spent the past two years struggling with and proving that statement to be true. Two years ago, my calendar was filled with ministry tasks. There wasn't a three day period that I didn't give up my time to participate in or lead some type of ministry event. And what I found after years of that type of schedule was that I was going through the motions. I was involved in great programs that had an effect on people's lives, but had lost my passion and missed the purpose.

Thankfully, at that point of burnout and lack of purpose, we found a church that was large enough that we could come in the back door, worship anonymously, and leave without people knowing who we were, or expecting us to get involved. My wife and I resigned our duties and obligations and became members of the faceless back row. We committed to each other and God that we would not get involved in anything for 6 months. It was to be a time of rest and healing. And boy was it nice. 18 months later, the path looks much different now.

Rick points out that there isn't enough time to do everything. And he suggests that if you can't get it all done, then you're doing too much. I'm guilty of sacrificing ministry at home for ministry in the church - as if the guy off the street needs to hear about Jesus more than my son, daughter, or wife.

*Volunteer coordinators everywhere are beginning to cringe...* Can I suggest, step back, take a look at what you are doing. Are you focusing your time and energy towards fulfilling the purpose God has given you? Or are you filling a hole for something that needs to get done? This is God's plan, His Church, and his volunteer list. If you're merely filling a gap, you're taking the spot of someone whose purpose is to fill that gap. Pray for clarity between the two.

**Question to Consider:** *What would my family and friends say is the driving force of my life? What do I want it to be?*

- mark

## Day 4

### **Made to Last Forever**

*"Surely God would not have created such a being as man to exist only for a day! No, no, man was made for immortality." - Abraham Lincoln*

This life is not all there is... but don't we live like it is? Don't we put more effort into getting and doing than we do in making the transition towards the eternal? Rick states, "Death is not your termination, but your transition into eternity..."

I see it like this; we spent time in the womb preparing for our childhood. We spent time as a child to prepare for being a young adult; time as a young adult to become an adult. These are physical and emotional transitional periods in our lives, but not permanent stopping grounds. Most people move from one to the other with the help of others in their developmental stages.

But what about spiritually? There is an ancient Jewish belief that everyone was created spiritually at one time, and that's why in Genesis (1:26 & 2:7) there are two accounts of the creation of man, a spiritual being and a physical being respectively. The spiritual being dwells with God until his/her time to be born into the world - a preparation period for the opportunity to bring glory to God. And then, being born into a sinful world and with a sinful nature, we have to choose to move beyond our nature into a relationship with our Creator and return to the reason that we were born in the first place; to bring glory to God. Once that transition has been made, then we move towards and prepare for what Rick calls death, "a transition into eternity".

I think this final life stage is what Paul speaks of when he says, *"When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things."* (1 Corinthians 13:11). And I believe that is what Rick is speaking of when he says, "God offers you an opportunity beyond your lifetime." The question falls to us as to where we are in our spiritual journey... Have we returned to a relationship with our Creator? Are we content to be spiritual infants? Spiritual children? Spiritual adults? Or are we truly preparing for a transition into eternity?

**Question to Consider:** *Since I was made to last forever, what is the one thing I should stop doing and the one thing I should start doing today?*

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## Day 5

### Seeing Life from God's View

*"We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are." - Anais Nin*

The way you see your life shapes your life... I've been thinking about this post all day long, trying to figure out what metaphor I conform to. But I'm not sure I've grabbed hold of one and am using it to describe my life. Is it a journey? Sure it is, unpredictable and stormy at times - beautiful and calm at others. Is it a race? Yep, and what a prize at the end - an eternity with my creator. Maybe I'll stick with a journey - but maybe I'll change my mind before I finish this post...

Rick uses the Today's English Version's translation of Romans 12:2, but I really like the Message's translation for this one:

*Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.*

I see in this verse the keys to passing life's tests and building God's trust. If we focus our attention on Christ, we'll recognize what he wants us to do. The harder piece for me is to quickly respond. But when I follow through, I pass God's test, develop His trust, and He fulfills His promise in developing my maturity.

**Question to Consider:** *What has happened to me recently that I now realize was a test from God? What are the greatest matters God has entrusted to me?*

- mark

## Day 6

### **Life Is a Temporary Assignment**

*"I'm just someone digging around in the garbage looking for something that matters." - Joan of Arcadia*

Life on earth is a temporary assignment... but it doesn't always feel like it. I can't grasp hold of how long an eternity must be. But that's because to imagine an eternity, I compare it to: the last day of school before summer break, the last night of summer before going back to school, or the amount of time I can hold one of my kids asleep on my lap. Eternity has a start and an end in my mind, because I need those reference points to bring understanding to the concept of eternity. But God doesn't see eternity through my limited bounds. He sees eternity as then (backwards), now, and then (forwards), all at the same time - because he's God. He looks at this time on earth as a blink of an eye compared to the vastness of eternity.

Rick points out two truths to remember about this life: "First, compared with eternity, life is extremely brief. Second, earth is only a temporary residence. You won't be here long, so don't get too attached." Even though they don't always get lived out the way my head knows them to be true, I find hope in these two truths. Once we grasp hold of these two truths, things in this life appear through a different light. Unfortunately, the person sitting next to you may not have come to this realization and all they are living for is what tomorrow might hold.

Rick uses two illustrations in this chapter about being an ambassador and never being content in an environment that wasn't meant for eternity. They bring to mind the transformation that takes place when a person discovers Christ and all He has to offer. There is a transformation from the world to the Church (capital C, God's community). Wonderful things take place in a life as it discovers all that God's community has to offer (growth, accountability, comfort, love, joy...).

Too many Christians find this as their final resting place as they wait to make the transformation from earth to eternity. But, there needs to be a second transformation from the Church back into the world. 20 years ago, Billy Graham could hold up his leather-bound book and proclaim, "The Bible says..." and most people, having grown up with a Judeo-Christian background, would stop and accept the words following as truth. But today, the under 30 generations, haven't and aren't growing up with that Judeo-Christian background. In fact, they are more likely to tune out before the truth is ever spoken. Like missionaries, we have to be able to relate the Gospel message into a foreign (and in our case, often hostile) land.

Don't treat this life as forever - and don't let that guy next to you either...

**Question to Consider:** *How should the fact that life on earth is just a temporary assignment change the way I am living right now?*

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## Day 7

**The Reason for Everything**

*"The glory of God is a human being fully alive!" - St. Irenaeus*

It's all for him... the key to this book, our journey, and our purpose. If there is a foundation needed to build purpose upon, these five words, "It is all for him." would be that foundation. The previous six days danced around, each touching on this foundational truth, but here it is point blank. It is all for him! What we say, what we do, how we act/react, the type of man/woman we are, the type of parent/friend/child/sibling/acquaintance that we are, is all for him. We are here for the sole purpose of bringing glory to God. How does that happen?

We bring glory to God by:

- worshiping him
- loving other believers
- becoming like Christ
- serving others with our gifts
- telling others about him

The rest of our 40 days will be looking at each of these five ways to bring glory to God.

*"Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God." 2 Peter 1:3 (Message)*

If you haven't made a decision to live your life for God's purpose, you can do so right now.  
*"First, believe. Believe God loves you and made you for his purposes. Believe you're not an accident. Believe you were made to last forever. Believe God has chosen you to have a relationship with Jesus, who died on the cross for you. Believe that no matter what you've done, God wants to forgive you.*

*Second, receive. Receive Jesus into your life as your Lord and Savior. Receive his forgiveness for your sins. Receive his Spirit, who will give you the power to fulfill your life purpose." (The Purpose Driven Life, Rick Warren)*

*"Whoever accepts and trust the Son gets in on everything, life complete and forever!" John 3:36a (Message)*

**Question to Consider:** *Where in my daily routine can I become more aware of God's glory?*

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## Day 8

### Planned for God's Pleasure

*"A dairymaid can milk cows to the glory of God." - Martin Luther*

You were planned for God's pleasure... but do we plan to bring pleasure to God? As I read this chapter, I resonated with more points here than any other chapter thus far. I should tell you that as a consumer of spiritual goods and services, I love worship music. In fact, I would rather "listen" (sing if I can't be heard) to worship music than any other in-car pastime. But, does that mean I'm worshipping God in the process?

Maybe, but maybe not. Rick defines worship as "bringing pleasure to God". So, but that definition, I'm only worshipping God if I'm bringing pleasure to him. But, what if my favorite worship song becomes just a fun song to sing along with? When I sing it, does it bring pleasure to God? Where are my motives? I contend that singing a great worship song with no honor to God is no different than singing along with a good 80's song. Because worship is about bringing pleasure to God, if we fail to honor him in our acts of worship, they fail to be worshipful acts.

It's not my intention to focus worship around music. I think Rick does a great job in pointing out that worship moves far beyond music. Louie Giglio, Visionary for the ministries of Passion, wrote a book entirely on worship titled, *The Air I Breathe*. The premise of the book is that because we were made to worship, we will worship something. We can choose to worship God, ourselves, jobs, family, sports, current events, or anything else that consumes our thoughts or time.

Using family as an example, I can choose to worship family, or I can choose to worship God through/with my family. I could spend all of my time and energy making my family a tight knit unit; a safe place for my kids to grow up with experiences that shape who they will become. Or, I can guide my family into areas where we can serve God; a place where my kids can learn that it is better to build God's kingdom than it is to build one for ourselves. Family is just an example. Anything could be used in its place. We can bring pleasure to God with just about anything, as long as it is done to bring pleasure to God.

**Question to Consider:** *What common task could I start doing as if I were doing it directly for Jesus?*

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## Day 9

**What Makes God Smile?**

*"Smile on me, your servant; teach me the right way to live." Psalm 119:135 (Message)*

The smile of God is the goal of your life... and Noah is our example? I grew up with the story of Noah. I'm not sure it was my first story I learned, it might have been Jonah, or David & Goliath, but it was definitely in the first five. I remember the flannel-graph with the felt cutouts of Noah, the Ark, and the animals two by two. The waters rose and receded and Noah was left to start over. God promised not to flood the world again and made a promise signified with the rainbow.

*Noah was a pleasure to the Lord. Genesis 6:8 (Living Bible)*

Noah was the only one God could find worth keeping around. It would have been just as easy to wipe out everything and everyone and start with a new Adam and a new Eve. But because Noah was an upstanding kind of guy that honored God with the way he lived, God chose to rebuild with Noah and his family instead.

So Noah spends 120 years building the Ark. Noah and his family enters the Ark and the rains fall. After spending just over a year on the Ark, the land becomes dry and they are able to exit the Ark. God creates a covenant with Noah. A covenant! That's a word today that doesn't mean a whole lot. But a covenant in Biblical times was an everlasting promise that was more important than life itself. So, here's this guy that spends all this time with God, he enters into a covenant with God himself, and what is the next thing he does? Genesis 10:21 tells us that Noah gets drunk and naked. Somehow, I don't think this is what Rick Warren had in mind when using Noah as a role model for making God smile - or maybe the realism is exactly what Rick was looking for.

Noah's example does raise a good point; he's just a normal, everyday person that screws up too. It doesn't matter how long you spend with God, or how intimate you become with Him, you can still do things that don't bring Him any glory - it's an all day, everyday decision. And that should bring us hope. Because if God can use this guy to rebuild the world, then He can surely use you and me to effect our culture. But like Noah, if God's going to find favor in us, we need to love him supremely, trust him completely, obey him wholeheartedly, praise him continually, and use our abilities for his purposes.

**Question to Consider:** *Since God knows what is best, in what areas of my life do I need to trust him most?*

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## Day 10

### The Heart of Worship

*"I am not, but I know I AM." - Louie Giglio*

The heart of worship is surrender... surrender doesn't weaken you, it strengthens you. After watching the Pat Tillman memorial service last night on ESPN, what a fitting chapter. For those of you that don't follow sports, or don't know who Pat Tillman was, he was a profoundly successful NFL player that gave up his NFL career and a 3.6 million dollar contract to join the Army Rangers following the September 11th tragedies. Pat was killed in action on April 22 in Afghanistan.

The two-hour memorial was attended by a few thousand honored guests including, John McCain, Maria Shriver, former teammates and coaches, family, friends, and admirers of Pat. It was truly a great tribute for an honorable man that did what he was able for a cause that he believed in - America.

"Pat knew his purpose in life. He proudly walked away from a career in football to a greater calling." Dave McGinnis, former Arizona Cardinals Head Coach

I was drawn to the speakers as they formed their pictures of who Pat Tillman was and what he meant to each of them. It was especially interesting as several of the speakers spoke of Pat's obvious search for meaning. He read the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and the Bible that were mentioned. It's obvious that for a man with such honor, dignity, and sense of duty, that Pat Tillman had a heart willing to surrender to a cause beyond the Pat Tillman cause. But I wonder if Pat Tillman ever found the God that he was searching for?

As a follower of Christ, a worshipper of God, we can learn a great deal from the Pat Tillman story. Type "Pat Tillman" into Google and read a few articles. Take note of his never-ceasing drive, his relentless desire to become better at everything he did, his continual display of commitment, his loyalty, and the bond he formed with his family and friends. Notice how people that only met Pat one time, speak of how their lives were changed (quotes taken before Pat's death). With the exception of Billy Graham, can you name someone that national media would flock to in a Christian context, similar to the way they did with Pat Tillman? Why not?

To worship God is to surrender to His every whim. Our own fear, pride and confusion disrupt our worship. When we sell out there will be times "it will mean doing inconvenient, unpopular, costly, or seemingly impossible tasks", says Rick Warren. But if there are people willing to sell out for causes, even really good ones, here on earth (one's that will mean nothing in eternity), where are the people willing to sell out for the causes that mean everything for eternity?

**Question to Consider:** *What area of my life am I holding back from God?*

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## Day 11

**Becoming Best Friends with God**

*"There is more religion in some men's curses than in some men's prayers, especially if the former is sincere and the latter perfunctory." - J.W. MacGorman*

God wants to be your best friend... the good, the bad, and the ugly. Best friend, that's a pretty strong statement. I would say that I only have a handful of friends that I would even consider close friends; and God wants to be my best friend? That's truly amazing when I consider that he wants to hear me complain about what I don't like, argue about what I don't understand, and rejoice with him when I finally get something right.

Rick points out the need to maintain constant conversation with God and to continually meditate on him. These two together make up the picture I have for what God wants of our prayer life. Constantly talking to him, similar to what we would do if we were on a road trip with a friend. Some conversations might be of lasting significance, but others might not have anything of any real importance, just talk. And secondly, to meditate on him - to be aware of his presence in everything we do. For instance, when I see the flowers opening up in the morning, smell their fragrance, hear the birds chirping and realize that it is God that made them all and put them in those very spots, I have no choice but to recognize him. He's right there, his fingerprint right before my eyes, nose & ears. And when I find his fingerprint in my life, I'm reminded that he's in my life, thus stimulating our conversation together.

What's easy to pass over is the fingerprint God leaves behind. I find it easy to speak to God, especially when I realized that he already knows what I'm thinking and feeling. There isn't a way to fool him into thinking everything's ok if it's not, so it's not even worth trying. So, I'm honest. If I'm confused, I say so. If I'm thankful, I say so. If I'm mad, I tell him that too. It's not like I'm telling him anything he doesn't already know. And for that reason, I sometimes just let him know that I'm still here and want him to comfort my pains, calm my fears, and accept my thankfulness - because he can articulate the specifics better than I can remember their details.

*"Prayer lets you speak to God; meditation lets God speak to you." - Rick Warren*

**Question to Consider:** *What can I do to remind myself to think about God and talk to him more often throughout the day?*

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## Day 12

**Developing Your Friendship with God**

*"We will be friends until forever, just you wait see." - Pooh Bear*

You are as close to God as you choose to be... not want to be, but choose to be. There is a big difference. I know that I want to be close to God. I know that I want to know and have a relationship with the one who knows me better than I know myself. But sometimes I don't choose to allow that to happen. Sometimes, I choose to get by on my own instead.

Thank you Rick Warren for pointing out that Job was not some patient guy, kicking back waiting for all the bad circumstances in his life to pass him by - because that was the image I grew up with. When I finally read the story myself, I found a very different man. If you haven't ever read Job, I highly recommend picking up *The Message* and reading it. You can read it online at [Bible Gateway, by clicking here](#). Job presents a great example of what it is to be honest with God.

Rick also points out the need to obey God even with it doesn't make sense, to share God's values, and to desire God's friendship more than anything else. When Job complained, I think these three points were at the root of his disdain. Job started out obeying God, but got tired. He remembered doing all the things that God would want him to do and yet he ended up in extreme calamity. He desired the closeness he once shared with God. And because he didn't understand why he was where he was, he was honest with God.

But don't read Job's complaining with out taking note of God's response. God is still God. He doesn't owe us any explanation - no matter who we think we are.

*And now, finally, GOD answered Job from the eye of a violent storm. He said: "Why do you confuse the issue? Why do you talk without knowing what you're talking about? Pull yourself together, Job! Up on your feet! Stand tall! I have some questions for you, and I want some straight answers. Where were you when I created the earth? Tell me, since you know so much!"*  
Job 38:1-4 (*Message*)

At the end of God's questions, Job again reminds us what a servant looks like. His final words: *"I'll never again live on crusts of hearsay, crumbs of rumor."* Job 42:6 (*Message*) Meaning that now that Job has experienced God, he won't be satisfied with who people say God is - he'll know God through his own experiences with God.

I compare Job's final statement to the way I read my Bible - or don't read it. Having grown up in the church, I have a decent base of knowledge to work from. But it continues to amaze me how little I really understand the story the Bible tells. I can narrate the Moses, Noah, the final days of Christ - you know the Bible School stories. But filling in the gaps between the "big stories" is often blurry. As I read those in between areas, it's amazing how much the "big stories" change. These people were not superheroes. They were simply people that chose to grow close to God - even with their faults...

**Question to Consider:** *What practical choices will I make today in order to grow closer to God?*

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## Day 13

**Worship That Pleases God**

*"Worship changes the worshipper into the image of the One worshipped." - Jack Hayford*

God wants all of you... all of you in church, all of you outside of church, all of you everywhere you go. Rick, continued today his list of characteristics of worship with accurate, authentic, thoughtful, and practical. All of which are embodied in the final illustration of the chapter.

Matt Redman is more than just a worship leader in England. At the time of the story he was on a cutting edge of worship leaders. The church where he led worship was known for the musical style in which they worshipped God. It was during this time that the leadership team realized that their "worship service" had lost its zeal and was more of a performance. There were more people consuming worship than participating in it. And that's when the senior pastor decided to remove the sound system and instruments from the worship service. In an interview, Matt tells how people didn't really know what to do at first, but before long the room broke out into acappella song and began to return to the worship that they had begun with. They returned to worshipping God as a body of believers instead of a congregation of people enjoying a performance.

Matt records that the song Heart of Worship was penned in his bedroom in just a few minutes just a few days into the church's removal of the sound gear. It was later tweaked to be more of a universal song that we all can relate to and not so specific to Matt's situation.

**Heart of Worship - Matt Redman**

*When the music fades and all is stripped away*

*And I simply come*

*Longing just to bring something that's of worth*

*That will bless Your heart*

*I'll bring You more than a song*

*For a song in itself*

*Is not what You have required*

*You search much deeper within*

*Through the way things appear*

*You're looking into my heart*

*I'm coming back to the heart of worship*

*And it's all about You*

*All about You, Jesus*

*I'm sorry, Lord, for the things I've made it*

*When it's all about You*

*All about You, Jesus*

*King of endless worth, no one could express*

*How much You deserve*

*Though I'm weak and poor, all I have is Yours*

*Every single breath*

**Question to Consider:** *Which is more pleasing to God right now - my public worship or my private worship? What will I do about this?*

- mark

## Day 14

### **When God Seems Distant**

*"Never doubt in the dark what God told you in the light." - V. Raymond Edman*

God is real, no matter how you feel... like Forest Gump said, "And that's all I've got to say about that." I'm at a loss for words on how to focus in on this chapter's material.

The only way I can relate to God when he doesn't allow us to feel his presence in our lives is similar to the light in the refrigerator. When we shut the door, the light goes out (it really does - I've checked). But when we open the door back up, the light comes back on. It goes out because it doesn't serve its purpose when the door is shut. I think God pulls the feeling of his presence away when it doesn't serve its purpose.

Would he remove the feeling as some cruel joke, like dangling food just out of the reach of a chained animal? I don't think so. I believe he only removes the feeling of his presence when we need to learn to trust him without being able to feel him. The hard part is waiting for the light to come back on - without giving up hope. If you're reading this and can't fathom feeling like giving up hope when the light is out, then maybe your light hasn't been out long enough... Look at Job again. His light was out for a long time before he began to doubt God's plan.

**Question to Consider:** *How can I stay focused on God's presence, especially when he feels distant?*

- mark

## Day 15

### **Formed for God's Family**

*"Life's journey is circular, it appears. The years don't carry us away from our fathers - they return us to them." - Michel Marriott*

You were formed for God's family... you began as God's family, but you choose whether to remain in the family. I accepted the belief that children who died, before the age of reasoning (a time at which they could understand that Christ died for their sins and desired a redemptive relationship with them for eternity), would be accepted into heaven. I didn't have any Biblical references for my belief; it was just something that I grew up with. But in writing this post, I've found the basis for that belief lies in 2 Samuel 12:23 & Matthew 19:14. There are other verses that expand on the thought, but these seem to be the basis.

I find this interesting because it suggests that we were not only created to be part of God's family, but we were initially born into it. It's not until we reach that age of reasoning that we are required to declare our affiliation. Somewhere we "learn" that it is better to be outside of God's family requiring us to make a decision to be reborn into God's family. Christ even says: *Unless you change and become as little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3).*

I fully understand choosing to be in a relationship with family. At times in my life, I've chosen to be intimate with family, while at others I've chosen to alienate myself. God desires our relationship. He doesn't need it, but he wants it. He wants us to declare our affiliation. That's the purpose of Baptism. That's why he challenges us to tell other people about him and help them to understand his love for them. We can't do that if we don't declare our affiliation.

**Question to Consider:** *How can I start treating other believers like members of my own family?*

- mark

## Day 16

### **What Matters Most**

*"It's not what you do, but how much love you put into it that matters." - Mother Teresa*

Life is all about love... and love is all about what's important to us. We honor the things that we deem important with our time. And our day planners will tell us what's important to us. If something's really important, we'll adjust our schedule for those unexpected times. But it's when we choose to make people important that we find out what matters most to God.

Rick goes to some pretty great lengths to point out that God intends for us to love each other - and for christians to especially love other christians. I see the importance of this in line with scripture, but it leaves a bad taste in my mouth to see it in writing in this way. When I hear the words, "Show special love for God's people." as a call to make our relationships with other christians more important than those with non-christians, I'm taken aback.

I believe God's intent in loving each other, and that "we will be known by our love" is not limited to just our relationships within the church but those interwoven with all of God's creation. I can't accept that God would form a spiritual country club out of the Church. I believe the purpose of the Church goes beyond building each other up and reaches out beyond its walls to the cultures they live within.

God made us all. We are all his creations. He loves every one of us just the same. It is we that choose to accept that love and live it out, or to deny it and live our lives on our own. It's when we accept his love, reach out to those around us, christian and non alike, that the world will know that we are His disciples.

**Question to Consider:** *Honestly, are relationships my first priority? How can I ensure that they are?*

- mark

## Day 17

### A Place to Belong

*"Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name (bom bom bom bom) - and they're always glad you came." - Theme song from Cheers ("boms" added for effect)*

You are called to belong, not just believe... but what do we belong to? Let me preface my thoughts on this chapter with one statement: I believe a follower of Christ should be in relationship with a group of other followers that will help mentor and guide the person's spiritual growth and maturity. For the most part, I resonate with Rick's outline in this chapter. I agree a follower of Christ needs identity, community, growth, a place in the big picture, and accountability. Where my questions arise are when we assume the church will meet these goals. They should! But that depends on whether we're making that happen together or if we just think it will take place by showing up a couple times a week in a communal event.

I don't want to downplay the church's role in the christian journey, but what if a relationship at work fulfilled these same goals? Would it not be just as valid as that of the church body? What if there were three or four guys in an office building that entered into a sincere relationship of christian mentoring and accountability? What if that group affected the culture of that office building by the influence that they allowed Christ to have through them? Would that not be the same goal that the church was commissioned to fulfill?

I'm not suggesting that the church is to be replaced with small groups of people banding together in Christ's name, but what if the church were made up of small groups of people that band together outside of the four walls we meet within on Sunday morning like they do inside. What message would we send if we treated each other Monday morning at work like we do Sunday morning at our worship gatherings? Or maybe the problem is that we treat each other the same way on Sunday as we do on Monday morning. Are we a family or just people with a shared interest?

I believe you were meant to influence my life. It's my responsibility to be open enough to allow that to happen. The other side of that coin is that I have an influence on your life as well - what kind of effort am I putting forth in that regard?

**Question to Consider:** *Does my level of involvement in my local church demonstrate that I love and am committed to God's family?*

- mark

Day 18

### **Experiencing Life Together**

*Dante: "You hate people."*

*Randal: "But I love gatherings. Isn't it ironic!"*

*(dialogue from the film Clerks - by Kevin Smith)*

Life is meant to be shared... shared with people like you and people that are completely different as well. Both groups offer a dynamic that when mixed provide the aspects of fellowship that are desirable.

The small group that I'm reading and discussing Purpose Driven Life with has been an unusually refreshing addition to my week. This is a newly formed group. There wasn't a single person who knew everyone else going into this adventure. I would have expected conversation to be shallow or potentially non-existent at times. But after both our meetings it was mentioned at how open the group was about sharing more than surface level observations.

After our initial meeting on the church campus, we chose to meet at Borders. Again, a potential conversation buster, as we've been conditioned in our political correct culture not to discuss christianity openly in public. There's no way I would have believed that many of us have only known the people sitting next to us for a matter of hours based on the genuine honesty in our dialogue.

I think this group jumped right past the "getting to know you" phase and dove right into the "let's have an impact on each other's lives." I believe this is what Rick describes in this chapter; and what God desires from our friendships.

I hope you partner with a group, or at least another person, to discuss this book and God's hand in your life. It's encouraging and inspiring to hear how we understand and apply these principles in the same and different ways. Encouraging that others read and understand the same things I do, and inspiring when we differ, and are challenged to reevaluate what we think we understand.

**Question to Consider:** *What one step can I take today to connect with another believer at a more genuine, heart-to-heart level?*

- mark

Day 19

### **Cultivating Community**

*"I am a part of all that I have met." - Alfred Tennyson*

Community requires commitment... commitment to yourself and commitment to those with whom you bind. Like any relationship, there is a two-part commitment; the one you make to yourself to make the relationship important and the one you make to others to make the relationship important. When either breaks down, or is left out, the relationship suffers. Community is simply a gathering of relationships.

I understand Rick's suggestion of creating a group charter that outlines the ground rules for what goes on in and around the group. But I think it might have some backlash as well. I read the list of things to include and thought, "What a good idea." But then, in the light of a relationship, I pictured a pre-nuptial agreement. Maybe I'm old fashioned, or maybe I just don't have anything that's of enough value that I would need to segregate it from someone with whom I'm entering into a commitment.

I think that community should be a gathering of friends. Friends that hold each other in high enough esteem that there isn't a need for ground rules. Friends that will work together for the betterment of each other. Friends that will, at times, mess up, and have to ask for forgiveness. Friends that will look beyond personal fault and find forgiveness to give and receive. And when that happens, I think God will allow our communities to impact our cultures - which is what he's really looking for.

**Question to Consider:** *How can I help cultivate today the characteristics of real community in my small group and my church?*

- mark

## Day 20

### Restoring Broken Fellowship

*"A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out. Friendship is one mind in two bodies." -Mencius*

Relationships are always worth restoring... even the ones that you don't care to restore. I can't believe that this would be the topic for today. As I read this chapter this morning, I thought about how ironic it was for me to be reading a chapter on restoration on the day that I would be seeing many of my family members for the first time in 7 - 12.5 years, depending on the person.

Twelve and a half years ago, my wife and I got married, packed up our stuff and moved from Colorado Springs to N. Chicago. And to be quite honest, I've never looked back. Some of my newly acquired family members are great and are people that I keep in contact with, but others, were left behind for a reason. Not necessarily good reasons, but reasons all the same.

So, here I am, back in Colorado Springs, getting ready for my sister-in-law's wedding and I find myself face-to-face with the family I love and the ones I tolerate - just being honest. Time passes, and finally, I find myself sitting with those that I'm not so fond of, and what keeps going through my mind - today's chapter.

The worst part is this, they are not christians - and they know that I am. I know that I'm being judged, measured, and viewed in light of my affiliation to Christ. I'm aware that my actions, reactions, demeanor, and conversation may be the closest thing to Christ that these folks might hear for days, weeks, or months. So, I sit, I smile, and I try to provide a restoration environment.

I'll be honest, I didn't sit down and have a heart to heart like the book suggests. I didn't hit all the points that Rick outlined. But I didn't drive any bigger wedge between us either. And maybe, by listening, not avoiding the situation completely, I've opened the door for moving closer to some of those steps that Rick outlined.

**Question to Consider:** *Who do I need to restore a broken relationship with today?*

- mark

## Day 21

### Protecting Your Church

*"I wouldn't want to belong to any club that would let me in." - Groucho Marx*

It is your job to protect the unity of your church... even when it makes you uncomfortable. Having been a part of a church that all but destroyed itself from the inside out, I understand what this chapter means. It quite simply can be restated as, "The goals of the Church are more important than the goals of its leaders and followers."

Christ commissioned the Church. He set it up to serve his purposes. Unfortunately for us, he put other people like you and me in charge of areas within. That means that at times, our leaders (you and me to those following us) will fail. They/we will become self-sufficient, self-serving, and self-gratifying. Our failure may occur as an unintentional progression of success. Or our ministries might grow into something that they just weren't meant to be.

The challenge becomes to bring order back to the mission of the Church without disrupting the spiritual formation of those leading and those following. Once again, it is Christ's Church and his plan. And that is where I think Rick is going with protecting the church. Not to protect, or brush under the rug when negative occurrences arise; but to protect the Church body as the negative occurrences are dealt with biblically.

Each of us owns a piece of that responsibility. We are directed to know what is going on in our church. We should question the how and why things are done, balance them against scripture and culture, and determine if they meet the goal that Christ has set forth for his Church. When they do - then support and defend. If they don't, make sure we understand what is going on (it may be that we've missed the boat on the how and why). Discuss it with the leadership - not everyone else. Likewise, direct others to do the same. In all of this, pray. Pray for our leadership's clarity of direction, and our own faithfulness to follow.

**Question to Consider:** *What am I personally doing to protect unity in my church family right now?*

- mark

## Day 22

**Created to Become Like Christ**

*"I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." - Mahatma Gandhi*

You were created to become like Christ... but do you know what that means? In reading this chapter, one thing really stood out to me. Rick points out that God uses three things to let us know the character of Christ; the Bible, our experiences, and other people. One of these is extremely overlooked, but it's not the one that is pointed out in the book.

For all of my life, I've sat in church, listened to preachers, participated in Sunday School, and even led others in the same. But in looking back and examining my own beliefs, I accepted and taught an image of Christ that I was told about and experienced. I wholly involved myself in experiences and other people for my perception of who Christ was and is. I neglected the first hand account of what the Bible had to say.

Sometimes, I fooled myself into believing that I couldn't understand what the Bible was saying. Sometimes, I bought into the idea that the guy behind the pulpit had a better understanding, or an inside track, with what the Bible had to say. Sometimes, I just didn't find the importance of figuring it out for myself. In doing so, I decided that the Christ that I was told about was the one that I would choose to follow.

It was kind of like you telling me about a car that you were selling. You told me the color, how many miles it had on the engine, any defects, and how well it drove. You paint your picture of this car that you've driven for a few years and convince me to buy it. So, I write out a check and poof, I have a new car. But, I've never really seen the car. I've never taken it out for a drive. And I've never shown it to any of my friends. I took your word for what I've bought.

Remember, I also said that I taught about a Christ that I hadn't explored myself. So, to continue to my analogy from above... Before I actually see or drive the car, I decide to sell it to someone else. I describe the car as best as I can. But, my zeal for the car's finer points get lost because my passion is not as deep as yours was. I might be able to close the deal, but the new owner has even a less vivid image of what they have bought.

That's where, I'm afraid, that too many christians are - holding a bill of sale for something they don't have a clear picture of. Many churches promote experience and interaction as vital to your spiritual growth. We've just examined a whole section in this book on the topic. But, too often we're willing to accept our friends, mentors, or even our pastor's view of who the Bible says Christ is. All while we have the same resources to make our own evaluation. Maybe it's time we break out our Bibles and figure out if what we think we believe is what the Bible says to be true.

**Question to Consider:** *In what area of my life do I need to ask for the Spirit's power to be like Christ today?*

- mark

## Day 23

### How We Grow

*"Jesus keeps saying to his disciples, like, you can do it. "You didn't choose me; I chose you." - Rob Bell (Leadership Magazine, Spring 2004)*

God wants you to grow up... just like he wanted the disciples to grow up during Christ's days on Earth. Rick makes a statement in the beginning paragraphs of this chapter that I completely misunderstood and disagreed with on my first read. He states, "When the first disciples chose to follow Jesus, they didn't understand all the implications of their decision."

A few years ago I discovered some elements of the Jewish culture during the times Christ would have been choosing his disciples. Rob Bell and Ray Vander Laan teach that the highest honor during a young man's life would be to be chosen by the Rabbi to be his disciple. Jesus, being a Rabbi, chose young men that had begun learning a trade. He finds Simon, Andrew, James and John fishing (Matthew 4). He finds Matthew as a tax collector (Matthew 10). These were young men that were likely to have been passed over by one of the local Rabbi's as not being good enough to follow in his footsteps. But Jesus seeks them out and chooses them.

Just the fact that he sought them out was contradictory to the way things were done in that time. Boys would, after having studied, learned, and memorized the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) by the age of 12, would have moved on to learning the better part of what we now call the Old Testament. They would then present themselves to the Rabbi to be tested. If the Rabbi was pleased and thought the boy could follow in the Rabbi's shoes, he would call him as his disciple and ask the boy to take the Rabbi's yoke (his beliefs and teachings about the Torah) upon him. If the Rabbi didn't find the boy to have what it takes, he sent him off to learn a trade.

Being that the Disciples would have grown up in this type of environment, when a Rabbi comes walking down the beach, like in Simon and Andrew's case, and called them to be his disciples, they understood fully what that call meant. They were to leave behind their family, their trade, their friends and seek to be just like their Rabbi. So, for Rick to say that the Disciples didn't understand the implications of their decision, I was taken a back.

But then I realized what Rick meant. The Disciples understood what it meant to become a disciple; they didn't comprehend what it meant to become Christ's disciple. They were not going to learn, interpret and teach Torah like every other Rabbi, they were going to live with, love, and ultimately teach the fulfillment of the Torah in Christ.

We too have been chosen by Christ to become his disciples - we do not choose him; we accept his calling or we pass it by.

**Question to Consider:** *What is one area where I need to stop thinking my way and start thinking God's way?*

- mark

## Day 24

**Transformed by Truth**

*"Truth is a passion. One cannot learn it; one must possess it." - Ernst Toller*

The truth transforms us... but so we really want to know the truth? I think this is the foundational question to ask as to why we do and do not read the Bible.

For those of us that were raised with a Judeo-Christian background and hold some foundation that the Bible is the Word of God, the only reason I can come up with for not reading the Bible is that we don't want to know what the truth is. We may mask our desires by not placing importance on reading the Bible, or maybe even accepting someone else's account of what it says. But when it comes right down to it, I think we don't want to know what the truth is. That way we won't have to deal with whatever the truth might require us to change in our own lives.

For those of us with a post-Christian or postmodern background, there are whole different reasons for not reading the bible. The post-Christian has likely been turned off by something or someone in the church and has written off God as the source for truth. Postmoderns may view God as a source of truth, but not necessarily as the only source. So, they might read the Bible, but right in line with the Koran and Buddhist sutras. Both suggest that the Bible, while it may be good book, is not "THE" or "The ONLY" source of truth in this world.

So, why don't we value the truths within our Bibles? I'm speaking for myself as much - probably more - than for you. I've got more Bibles, or access to more Bibles, than some small countries have access to. There's a friend of mine that works for Wycliff, a Bible translation organization, who tells me how some translators make it their life's work to make the Bible available in a native language, so one more group of people will be able to hear God's truth in their own language. And I sit here with at least 15 different translations in English at my fingertips - most of them dusty, for lack of use - why?

God's truths lie within - I'm sure of that. And I know I have a desire to put his truths into action in my life. But, I don't take the time I need, to find, examine, study, and apply those truths. Over a year ago, I began a quest to read through The Message (a paraphrase translation of the Bible in modern English), for no other reason than to capture God's story. Well, I'm about half way through right now. Half way, because I've gone in spurts as to how much and how often I sit down and read. If you see me around, ask me where I'm at - hold me accountable. I want to capture the truths that are buried in the obscure places that preachers don't speak on and writers don't explore.

**Question to Consider:** *What has God already told me in his Word that I haven't started doing yet?*

- mark

Day 25

### **Transformed by Trouble**

*"If you suffer, thank God! - it is a sure sign that you are alive." - Elbert Hubbard*

God has a purpose behind every problem... even when it doesn't make any sense at all. As I read today's chapter, there was no doubt what this post would be about. I've faced / am facing a "problem" that doesn't make any sense to me - but I know God has a plan.

About 7 months ago, my Dad was diagnosed with colorectal cancer. But what made the news all the more worse, is that my father and I have found a bond that did not exist during my childhood years. You see, I grew up with an alcoholic for a father and didn't have much of a relationship with him. During my High School years, my Dad entered into a relationship with Christ and was called into full-time ministry. So, just after my freshman year, our family moved from Illinois to Colorado Springs, CO for Dad to pursue the education he needed to become a pastor.

All of which would make for a touching Hallmark movie of the week, unless you're the child that has gotten used to not having a father around. It's a great transition, unless you're the boy that had finally found a sense of who he was and where he was going - only to be moved across the country. It's wonderful, unless that father wants to make up for lost time only to be shut out by a defensive teenager.

It wasn't long after I graduated from High School that I discovered the comfort that my Dad was offering to me. He wasn't trying to make up for lost time, but trying to forge ahead with the time that we still had left - and we've grown rather close over the past 15 years. Dad's moved around a bit as a pastor, so we've always had to deal with the distance between us. But just last year, he made the move to a church just five hours away. It's the closest we've been since I lived with them. I was truly happy that my kids were going to be close enough to my parents to really get a chance to build relationships beyond phone calls and annual visits.

And then, sometime in October/November, Dad was diagnosed with cancer. My heart literally broke because all I heard was that my Dad was going to die. The physicians went to work and scheduled the surgeries and on the day before Thanksgiving, my Dad underwent an all day surgery that removed the cancer from his body. That was a long hard day for my family. There was a sense as we were left as the last family in the waiting room that maybe something just didn't go as planned. But as the sun was beginning to set, the doctor came out and assured us that the operation went well.

Thanksgiving day was filled with extreme highs and sobering understandings. It was amazing to walk into my Dad's room Thanksgiving morning and see him waiting for football to begin and cracking jokes with the nurses and us. All along God had been teaching me the importance of trusting Him and thanking Him for all that He gives me.

I had been reading a few books along with the book of Job from The Message, and had been struggling with God from the time Dad was diagnosed to the time of his surgery. There were times as a child that I had wished my father didn't exist, but when faced with that possibility now, I was scared/hurt/ticked off at God for letting this happen. But, I knew my Dad was God's man. And if God was going to use my father for something by taking him into and hopefully through this cancer thing, then I needed to jump on board. After all, God is still God and I'm just me.

So, Thanksgiving Day, my Mom, sister, and I went out for lunch. As I sat down my Mom let me bless the food. For the first time in the whole process, I audibly thanked God for what He was doing in my Dad's life. Not because the surgery had been successful, but because I knew He was in control and in charge of the plan. That was a short prayer with a few very lengthy pauses. Dad just finished his final weeks of radiation and chemo and from what the Doctor's had previously told him, he's not in remission, he is cured! Thank you God!

**Question to Consider:** *What problem in my life has caused the greatest growth in me?*

- mark

Day 26

**Growing through Temptation**

*"You cannot keep birds from flying over your head but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair." - Martin Luther*

Every temptation is an opportunity to do good... and that is the best reason that I can come up with for why Christ would allow us to be tempted.

I understand that temptations are meant to help us to grow closer to God - to become more mature in the way we follow Him and live our lives. But I hadn't thought that through to the point of actually thinking that every time we are faced with some sort of temptation, we aren't being tested as to if we will disobey God, but instead whether we will obey and follow after what He chooses for us.

**Question to Consider:** *What Christlike character quality can I develop by defeating the most common temptation I face?*

- mark

## Day 27

### Defeating Temptation

*"The greatest discovery of our generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes." - William James*

There is always a way out... and the key is having a close enough relationship with someone that will hold you accountable. It's easy to sit back and theorize about making the right decisions. But I know in my experience when I don't have someone to keep me in check, I am more likely to wander down paths that I know better.

Like Rick points out, getting your mind focused on something other than the temptation at hand is a good idea, but that will only work for so long for me. If I don't let someone in on my struggle, I'm going to buckle under the pressure. I'm selective, no I'm hyper-selective when it comes to who I will and won't let into the struggles of my life. Unless, my struggles can help someone else...

Back when I was working with teens, it was pointed out to me that I would open up more in front of a group of teens than I would one on one with even those close to me. I'm very much a "let's move forward and not dwell in the past" kind of guy. But when one of my own struggles can help someone else realize that they aren't alone, or help illustrate a point, then I'm all about sharing where I've failed. On the other side of that coin, if my exposing my failures won't help the situation, or won't cause me to be accountable (in a good / safe way) you'll never know that I've gone down those roads.

A good friend reminds me quite often that Satan has no power over christians. He can tempt, but only to the extent that God allows. Satan is not all knowing, nor is he all-powerful - he is not God. God is God - and He IS all knowing and all-powerful. He holds our futures in His hands, when we follow after Him.

**Question to Consider:** *Who could I ask to be a spiritual partner to help me defeat a persistent temptation by praying for me?*

- mark

## Day 28

### It Takes Time

*"Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there." - Will Rogers*

There are no shortcuts to maturity... but we've got to pay attention to what's going on, or we'll miss the point. I look around the church today and see a whole lot of "mature" people sitting in the pews. They volunteer to help areas within the church to function like clockwork. I see a love and loyalty for the churches we attend. But what about the mission of the church?

In the book *The Emerging Church* by Dan Kimball, he speaks to the fact that we're functioning on the "If we build it, they will come." mentality. We expect to be able to impact our community and culture by what we do within the walls of our churches. We've forgotten that what we do within the walls of our churches has very little effect on our culture, because our culture has quit paying attention to the church.

Rick Warren has never been more correct in saying that it takes time to be like Christ. For our culture to see Christ, we are going to have to get up out of our pews and become missionaries in our own cities. We are going to have to reintroduce Christ into our communities. We can do that by engaging our culture; knowing what influences their decision making process, befriending those same people that our parents might have warned us about. I'm not saying to become one of those people that our parents warned us about, although, if you are a christian, you have become one of those people that their parents have warned them about...

We live in a mission field - right here, in whatever city you find yourself reading this. And the only way to reintroduce Christ's love to our culture is by taking the time to walk him through our city streets. Too many people have been turned off by what the church has offered, presented, displayed, or exhibited as the life of a christian. These are the same people that aren't going to walk through the doors on Sunday just because we have the best music, most inspirational pastor, or the coolest building. They'll come through the doors on Sunday when we've provided an example Monday through Saturday. And it's going to take some time...

**Question to Consider:** *In what area of my spiritual growth do I need to be more patient and persistent?*

- mark

Day 29

### **Accepting Your Assignment**

*“Even a single hair casts its shadow.” – Cyrus*

You were put on earth to make a contribution... and you will make one. But what will that contribution be? Will it be of lasting significance, or will it fade with your last breath?

This is a question that I consciously consider nearly every day of my life. Not because I've got some inside track on this whole search for significance thing, but because I've committed to leaving an impression that will carry over into the eternal. I've bought into the idea that there is more to my existence than the 70+ years that I'll likely spend on this Earth.

Rick goes to great lengths to convey that we have the responsibility to give something back to God; we're created, saved, called, and commanded to serve God. The next few chapters go into a bit of detail about how we give something back, so I'm not going to jump the gun. Simply to recognize that God wants us to serve him is the point of this chapter.

**Question to Consider:** *What is holding me back from accepting God's call to serve him?*

- mark

## Day 30

**Shaped for Serving God**

*"He who wishes to secure the good of others has already secured his own." – Confucius*

You were shaped to serve God... with what you have and what you love. God has given each one of us exactly what we need to do the task he has created us to do. He's even gone one step further and created within us a deep passion and love for the components that make up that task. Unfortunately for many of us, what we love and desire to spend our time doing doesn't include a significant, or possibly even any, dollar signs.

Everything before this paragraph applies to every single person on Earth. But from here on, use your better judgment; this is how the above relates to me.

I know, I love, and I am passionate about sharing my views and understanding of what God has done and shown me in my life. I know that my "calling", if you will, is to do just that. But when I look at careers that are centered on these things, I'm left to wonder how will I pay the bills. I am quick to tell others to trust God to provide, but when it comes to me... I'm not so anxious to take my own advice.

And so, I'm torn. Torn between doing what I love and doing what pays me well. A little more than a year ago I got my degree in Information Technology, Web Management. A good degree with lots of potential as the world becomes more reliant on the Internet. But it was also an area that I still see a great need within the church as well - yeah, maybe I'm justifying... Anyway, the undergrad degree is just a stepping-stone for where I'm headed anyway. I have a great desire to pursue my Masters in Theology.

I recall sitting in the last night of class for my undergrad and discussing what was next for each of us. I remember the looks of amazement as I explained that I was going to pursue Theology. The rest of my classmates were headed towards Masters in IS/IT or Masters of Business Administration. Every one of us were/are seeking for a way to balance what we want to do with what we have to do.

Something inside of me says I have to do more than just casually attend a local church. Maybe my days are set to spread God's insights on life across the web... Or maybe this web thing is just a stepping-stone for what God is preparing me for... Either way, I solicit your prayers for my direction & I'll pray for you as well.

**Question to Consider:** *In what way can I see myself passionately serving others and loving it?*

- mark

## Day 31

**Understanding Your Shape**

*"Experience is simply the name we give our mistakes." - Oscar Wilde*

Only you can be you... so don't try to be something you're not. That is the hardest thing for me to come to terms with. God made me to be me, not you, not him, and not her. I get into trouble when I look at you, or him, or her and see qualities that I long to exhibit. It's in those times that I think, "Hey, that really has an impact on people. I need to become that." And I'm sure, it's those times that God smiles and shakes his head at me.

I find it pretty easy to relate to this chapter; mixing my abilities, personality, and experiences to find what God wants me to do. But I think Rick comes up short in not addressing the same issues and pitfalls we face as a corporate body, or as a church. I know that when I visit, or read about a church, I look for aspects that can be used in other settings. For instance, I recently visited Vanguard Church in Colorado Springs and was so moved by the music we worshipped with. Instead of using off the shelf music, something that someone else puts together, Vanguard used original music composed from experiences lived out within their community. For me to copy the lyrics and music and regurgitate it in a different setting would lose some of the meaning - because it wasn't created for that environment. But, to take the idea that maybe music composed out of my community might be more effective and worshipful within my church than something off the shelf, is something worth considering.

I look around at churches today and see a bunch of cookie cutter Willow Creeks and Saddlebacks - and I have to say, it saddens me. Don't get me wrong, Willow and Saddleback have great resources and offer great insights. But what happened to contextualizing information to the audience it's being presented to? Why are we willing to settle for being the "Mini-Me" of a mega-church that has great impact on two sub-urban areas of the country, instead of being an awesome "Me" church that has profound impact in our little neck of the woods?

God has filled our churches with people with amazing talents. Maybe it's time we train and raise up leaders who will lead our individual communities instead of following after communities that may be extremely different from our own.

**Question to Consider:** *What God-given ability or personal experience can I offer to my church?*

- mark

## Day 32

### Using What God Gave You

*"If my life is fruitless, it doesn't matter who praises me, and if my life is fruitful, it doesn't matter who criticizes me." - John Bunyan*

God deserves your best... right here, right now. You are, today, different from whom you were yesterday. You will be different tomorrow from who you are today. There may only be subtle changes, but there is the same possibility that you will discover something that creates in you a dramatic change. Be who you are!

Rick reiterates much of the previous few chapters in this one to say two things: be happy who you are, because it's what God made you, and keep growing. Our lives are not a picture in time; they are organic, constantly changing, filled with emotions and circumstances. All of these lead us towards change. And yes, even the change is by God's design. He made us to be "this" for a while. But when we outgrow "this", move on to "that". Because God gave us "this", helped us change, and brings us into "that". It's a never-ending cycle. But I think too many of us pigeonhole ourselves into a little box based on what we were gifted in back then.

For me, this became evident when I realized it was time for me to move on from youth ministry. My heart for teenagers didn't change, but I did. I was good with teens. I related to them well, and I was effective. I exhibited many of the signs that Rick points out to follow to know where to minister. But, even though I was good at youth ministry, I had lost the passion and was ready to move on to something else. It was hard to move on, especially because I moved into a transitional, growth period, instead of right into another ministry opportunity. It didn't make much sense at the time, but looking back, it was the right move.

Basically what I take away from this chapter is that we are God's creation. I am not defined by my occupation, my ministry, my family, or even my theological views. I am defined through the eyes of Christ. It's when I accept this that I can accept who God made me to be - yesterday, today and tomorrow.

**Question to Consider:** *How can I make the best use of what God has given me?*

- mark

### Day 33

#### How Real Servants Act

*"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can." - John Wesley*

We serve God by serving others... our friends, neighbors, acquaintances, the UPS guy with a cart of boxes, the Mom with groceries and worn out kids... others. As I sit here typing this post, I look around my office and see much evidence of how I serve myself. It's easy for me to serve me. It takes some practice for me to serve others...

I've been told a story of a man who did dozens of the "little" things around his church. It was a small church and they were sad when the man passed away. The morning of his funeral service, people began arriving at the church and began to realize just how much the man did.

The first few people that arrived discovered the doors were still locked and none of them had a key with them - the man was always the first to arrive and unlock the doors. When they entered into the building, it was cold - the man was the one who came in the night before and adjusted the temperature. The chairs hadn't been arranged, along with several other things that the man always took care of. The service held much more meaning that day because not only did they miss this man, but they also realized what he had provided for the church. He had provided an example of what it is to be a servant.

Real servants make themselves available to serve.

Real servants pay attention to needs.

Real servants do their best with what they have.

Real servants do every task with equal dedication.

Real servants are faithful to their ministry.

Real servants maintain a low profile.

**Question to Consider:** *Which of the six characteristics of real servants offers the greatest challenge to me?*

- mark

## Day 34

### **Thinking Like a Servant**

*"Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible." - Francis of Assisi*

Service starts in your mind... but it's if it stays there that matters. It's easy to sit on the sidelines and determine that something needs to be done. It gets a bit harder to step up to the plate and make something happen.

Rick goes into a decent amount of detail about the heart of a servant and speaks specifically about being comfortable with the person that God has made. If we settle our identity crisis and determine that we are made exactly the way God wanted and possess the skills and abilities that God wants to use, we are likely to quit looking around for other people to justify our service.

For me, settling this issue was extremely liberating. No longer did I need to find the approval of others for me to be satisfied in the service I provided. When I decided to believe God in that he gave me abilities to use for him, I began listening to him and finding ways to do what he wanted. My service became an act towards God instead of acts to or for anyone else involved.

**Question to Consider:** *Am I usually more concerned about being served or finding ways to serve others?*

- mark

## Day 35

**God's Power in Your Weakness**

*"Find your true weakness and surrender to it. Therein lies the path to genius. Most people spend their lives using their strengths to overcome or cover up their weaknesses. Those few who use their strengths to incorporate their weaknesses, who don't divide themselves, those people are very rare. In any generation there are a few and they lead their generation." - Moshe Feldenkrais*

God loves to use weak people... especially if we are going to admit that we are weak. In looking back on my experiences, I know that when I admit my weaknesses, to God and to those around me, I have been the most effective.

One of my most "not so shining moments" was back when I worked with teenagers. Now, don't read that last sentence wrong and think that my "not so shining moments" are few and far between - I seem to find myself in them way too often... Anyway, back to my illustration, I had spent an entire weekend speaking at a youth retreat. I don't remember what the focus of the weekend was, but I do remember speaking to the group, speaking to individuals after and between messages, and even praying with a few people. One person, in particular, stood out because he seemed to have an inner dialog with God going on that weekend and was especially sensitive to what was going on. Well as the weekend was coming to an end, we packed up, loaded the vans, and hit the road. We almost made it home, when we made our typical stop for one final "meal" as a group - Wendy's at its finest. Everyone was tired - especially me, and the opportunity presented itself, as a few of the guys began to get out of control, for me to pull that one young man aside and begin to chew him out for being immature. Yep, not one of my finest moments.

After eating, we got back into the vans and made the rest of the journey home. Needless to say, my food didn't sit well as God began opening my eyes to just how insensitive I had been. Thankfully, our drive wasn't far. As we unloaded, I pulled the young man aside again, but this time to formally apologize for my actions and words.

Now, I'm not sure that my words hurt him as much as they did me, but I know the apology did us both good. Several others overheard the apology even though they weren't privy to the previous occurrence.

As the weeks after the retreat progressed, I witnessed the growth that began on that retreat - including in that one young man. I wonder how I might have negated that growth had I not allowed those teens to see me at one of my "not so shining moments" and me live to apologize and move on.

**Question to Consider:** *Am I limiting God's power in my life by trying to hide my weaknesses? What do I need to be honest about in order to help others?*

- mark

## Day 36

**Made for a Mission**

*"Knowing is not enough, we must apply. Willing is not enough, we must do." - Goethe*

You were made for a mission... and that mission is clear - tell people about Christ. This is one of the very few points that Rick makes that I completely, whole-heartedly agree with. We are commissioned to make disciples.

*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV)*

Rick hits the "go and make disciples" part pretty hard, but skips right over the "baptizing them" portion like many of us do. If we look up the word baptize in the dictionary, we find one of the definitions as being to initiate. If you then look up initiate, you find this definitional phrase: "to cause or facilitate the beginning of". Another dictionary says to "help to take the first steps". Telling people about Christ is not enough. We need to help them to take those first steps as a follower of Christ. We need to help facilitate the beginning of an eternal relationship.

It's easy, and gets easier the more you do it, to tell people about Christ. But to help them begin walking like a follower of Christ, we have to invest some time. We can make an introduction and then move on about our lives, but if we are going to help someone get to know their Creator, we are going to have to actually get to know them, become vulnerable to them, and share some accountability. Then, and only then, can we follow through with the commission that we were set out with.

**Question to Consider:** *What fears have kept me from fulfilling the mission God made me to accomplish? What keeps me from telling others the Good News?*

- mark

### Day 37

#### **Sharing Your Life Message**

*"He that gives good advice, builds with one hand; he that gives good counsel and example, builds with both; but he that gives good admonition and bad example, builds with one hand and pulls down with the other." - Francis Bacon, Sr.*

God has given you a Life Message to share... and we are going to share it whether we like it or not. We share our message through our conversations, when we're overheard, and when we are observed. Maybe our greatest time of sharing comes when we have no opportunity to say anything.

People see us every day. They watch our actions, our reactions. They listen to our words - in and out of context. They form an image of what our lives stand for. If they know we're christians, then they form the image of what Christ is based on how we live.

Sometimes we do a really great job of telling people what a christian looks like, but when they compare our words with our actions, there are two very different images that emerge. I don't think that is because we set out to live differently than we believe, but we don't spend as much time training our actions as we do learning how to sell the christian product. I'm reminded of Gandhi's quote that I posted previously in these 40 days where he says that christians are so unlike Christ. I think Rick's ideas of making lists of experiences and testimonies to better prepare ourselves of what to say when these experiences might help someone else, is a good idea. But I also think we need to train ourselves to walk through this life with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, like Paul suggest in Galatians.

**Question to Consider:** *As I reflect on my personal story, who does God want me to share it with?*

- mark

Day 38

**Becoming a World-Class Christian**

*"I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; I will not refuse to do something I can do." - Helen Keller*

The Great Commission is your commission... and my commission, and his commission, and her commission. We each share responsibility for making sure the word gets out.

It's funny, in a sick sort of way, how different we are when it comes to topics of religious nature compared to those of money. A few months back, my employer changed the way we were taxed when we cashed in our paid time off. It used to be that we were taxed in the same manner as if we had taken the days off and used them to compensate for our regular wages. But, with the new change, we were taxed at a flat 25% rate - considerably higher than the old method.

No memos were sent out. Nobody held meetings to notify staff the changes went into effect. One day it was the old way, the next it was different. As you can expect, when the first person cashed in some time off and received less than expected, an uproar occurred. Outrage set in and there was a buzz around the office. Maybe, I'm being a bit dramatic, but none-the-less everyone was talking about how this change took place.

Let's consider the same group of people with eternity at stake, not just a few percent of monies earned. How many of these people will find themselves in front of God someday only to find out that things changed and no one told them? To make it worse, we got the memo and didn't pass it on. We know the change is in effect - who are we telling?

**Question to Consider:** *What steps can I take to prepare to go on a short-term missions experience in the next year?*

- mark

## Day 39

**Balancing Your Life**

*"Be aware of wonder. Live a balanced life - learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some."* - Robert Fulghum

Blessed are the balanced; they shall outlast everyone... but do you really want to outlast everyone? I think I would just as soon prepare, take my turn at the plate, move on into coaching, and then retire.

It's obvious that the book's coming to an end, because the new thoughts are getting fewer and further between. But Rick does go a step farther in this chapter in that he gives some practical steps to live out this purpose driven life that he's been diagramming.

1. Talk it through with a spiritual partner or small group.
2. Give yourself a regular spiritual check-up.
3. Write down your progress in a journal.
4. Pass on what you know to others.

Let me point out that a simple blog, like this one here, provides a great way to live out these four steps. And it's extremely easy to setup and it's free! With this link [Blogger - click here](#) you can create your own blog. Share your thoughts, incite your own discussions, define exactly what you believe, and make a few friends.

For me, this blog has been a commitment to work through the entire Purpose Driven Life book. On my first "scan" of the book, I was extremely put off at how "churchy" the content is and the unattainable goal of knowing "how all the pieces of" my "life fit together". But, when I see the book on the endcap of every store I walk into, it's obvious that this book is connecting with people. So, I took on this blog to force me to find the redeeming qualities within. I hope I've caused you to read beyond the chapter into how you might apply what you've read.

If you launch your own blog, let me know - I'll provide a link to your blog from the upcoming redesign of [Off QUEUE](#).

**Question to Consider:** *Which of the four activities will I begin in order to stay on track and balance God's five purposes for my life?*

- mark

## Day 40

### Living with Purpose

*"Like what you do. If you don't like it, do something else." - Paul Harvey*

Living on purpose is the only way to really live. Everything else is just existing... are you living or existing? Rick challenges us to define a purpose statement for our lives. To be honest, I read his challenge and thought it was so cheezy that I blew right past it.

But I had to question why I thought it was cheezy. Was it cheezy because it holds no meaning - or is it because I might have to become accountable for the way I carry out my daily actions? I tend to believe it's more of the later in my case. So here goes...

I will continually pursue a deeper relationship with God and those around me as we discover who God is, how He affects us individually and communally, and how we can impact our cultures locally and globally.

1. What will be the center of my life?
2. What will be the character of my life?
3. What will be the contribution of my life?
4. What will be the communication of my life?
5. What will be the community of my life?

**Question to Consider:** *When will I take the time to write down my answers to life's five great questions? When will I put my purpose on paper?*

- mark

### Closing Remarks

Thank you for making this journey with me.

If you've pushed through 40 days of readings and posts, then you are probably like me - trying to figure out what these years on Earth are meant for. I hope you've found something - some little tidbit, or maybe a big "whomp" on the head, that resonates with the search you are on.

Rick's statement at the beginning of the book, "By the end of this journey you will know God's purpose for your life and will understand the big picture - how all the pieces of your life fit together." may be a bit lofty - or maybe not. I'm certain that I don't have it all figured out after 40 days of 8 to 10 minute reads. Moses and the Children of Israel wandered the desert for 40 years and still didn't get it. So, if you sit there reading this and still have questions - you're not alone.

But, I do walk away from this book with some defined truths:

1. God made me for a specific reason.
2. My life is best lived when in community.
3. The more like Christ I become, the more I become like God intended.
4. I was created individually, and gifted to serve a specific purpose.
5. God intends for me to use what He's given me.

I hope you take time to formulate your own purpose statement. It's not something in stone. It's more like an organic creation that will change, grow, and maybe evolve into something way different from what it begins like. But it will definitely put you on course to knowing what you're living for. If you're especially bold, maybe even share it with someone else.

Now that the 40 days are over, what now? Maybe you've grown to like the daily readings. Or maybe you want something more hands on to keep you moving forward. A few days ago, I began a book called, "[Making Room For Life - Trading Chaotic Lifestyles for Connected Relationships](#)" by Randy Frazee. Although I'm only half way into the book, it's pushing me in the areas of communal importance.

But whatever you do, don't stop your search with what you know now. These five principles are the tip of the iceberg. It's how we put them into action in our individual and communal lives that fulfills purpose.

If you've enjoyed this blog, watch [Off QUEUE](#) over the next couple of weeks as it is transformed into a similar type of blog where I'll share my life with those who care to join me. I look forward to communing with you...

- mark

Mark Foster is a man discovering what it means to become a follower of Christ. After a decade of hanging out with teenagers on the same journey, Mark created Off QUEUE. Off QUEUE is a web-based ministry that observes, critiques, and seeks to define what God's vision for what our lives might become. The daily ponderings of this book originated as a blog on Off QUEUE during the summer of 2004.

The Purpose Driven Life is a book written by Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, CA. All references to "Rick" within this booklet refer to statements made by Rick Warren. Likewise, the daily titles, and "Questions to Consider" are reproduced from the written text of The Purpose Driven Life.