

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE?

John Eldredge said that when we come into life it is similar to slipping into a dark movie theatre 15 minutes after the start of the film. The music is dramatic, the characters seem troubled, the situation feels threatening, but we don't know the good guys from the bad guys, and we don't know enough to figure out the plot or the issues. A cacophony of voices have offered their opinions to us as we have struggled to understand the issues in our plot, but you and I have heard the voice of One who claims to be the Way (the way to live), the Truth (about man, about sin and salvation, and about God), and the Life (and not just any life, but the life abundant and full of joy and peace and meaning). The Author of the story has even provided for us a Book of background and directions, although we feel like 2nd graders trying to comprehend a university level book. What has He told us about how to live?

As I understand it, He says that He created us for relationship with Himself, and that is where we will find our meaning and purpose, and only there. He sent His Son to be our Savior and Lord, our guide and navigator, our wisdom and our example. We are to seek to become like Him, to become Christ-like or Christian (which means "little Christ"). He explains that we can't accomplish this through our own strength or wisdom or trying, but only as we focus on Him and permit Him to lead us.

And it gets even more complicated: our focus, our goal is not to be on this life, but on heaven, on eternity! We are told that this world, everything we see about us is ephemeral, like gauze, like mist, like fog. It will soon melt away. But the real reality is invisible and eternal. Jesus tells us in His greatest sermon that we should not even lay up treasures on earth where they can disappear in a flash, but that we should lay up treasures in heaven! He also says that we should not worry, not even give a care about food and clothing, but simply trust our Father to take care of our every need. What a life of rest and peace, if we could only do it! if we only would do it!

He tells us that we can accomplish this impossible feat by basking in His love which is beyond comprehension. Then He tells us that He expects us to love Him back in the same wild, profligate way that He loves us. He really expects us to love Him so much that our love for our parents and spouse and children and our own life seems like hate in comparison! (Lk.14:26) He doesn't expect a little from us, He expects great things, magnificent things. *Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.* That is not only about Heaven, it is about NOW!

God also tells us that there are two kingdoms on earth, the kingdom of darkness and the Kingdom of Light (or the Kingdom of God), and that when we surrendered to Christ (and I chose that word "surrendered" purposely, because until we accepted Christ we were in active rebellion against God and belonged to the kingdom ruled by the devil) we changed allegiance and are now volunteers, soldiers in God's army. We are now part of a great, cosmic struggle to bring the Kingdom of God to earth and establish the victory, already won by Christ on the cross, over all the earth. How does the church, the body of believers, work together to accomplish these grand purposes of God? First, let's define the word "salvation:"

SALVATION AS USED IN THE BIBLE AND AS MISUSED IN THE CHURCH

Please recognize that “salvation,” derived from the Greek verb *sozo*, meaning “to save” and the noun *soter*, meaning “salvation,” is used in the Bible (see Strong’s concordance) to refer to not only (1) the saving of the soul (which is usually the only way this word is used in the church of our day), but for (2) physical and emotional healing, and for (3) deliverance from torment or from demons. Jesus demonstrated the full meaning of salvation again and again. The name Jesus means “Savior” or “Yahweh is Salvation.” When He quoted from Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:18, He said He came (1) to preach the gospel, (2) to heal, and (3) to set the captives free. He constantly did this three-fold ministry on earth: *And Jesus went about all Galilee, (1) teaching.....preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and (2) healing all kinds of sickness among the people....and they brought to Him those afflicted with ...disease and torments, and (3) those who were demon-possessed.....and He healed them.*(Mt.4:23ff) Jesus gave this three-fold ministry to His apostles (Mark 3:14-15), to other disciples (Luke 10), and to the church (Mark 16:15ff).

I know I have made this point many times, but I reiterate it, and permit me to yell in print: THIS IS THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH, THE GIFT OF SALVATION TO LOST, WOUNDED, SICK, DEMON-TORMENTED PEOPLE! We are failing and falling short unless and until we do this three-fold ministry. The only thing that prevents us from doing these works is unbelief and/or lack of courage (fear of man).

Let me develop this further by sharing some teaching from men that God is using in a very unusual way:

A DIFFERENT CONCEPTION OF DOING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

In his book, There is More, Randy Clark tells how God changed his life and his ministry. In 1983 he was a Baptist pastor, and one day he was sitting at his desk saying, “Oh, Lord, I’m glad I’m not a liberal who doesn’t believe You did the miraculous things in the Bible. I’m glad I’m not a cessationist who believes You did the miraculous in the past, but that You’ve quit doing them now. Thank You’ (I was quite the Pharisee.) Then I heard an impression in my head, very clear and strong. It said, ‘So what? You might as well be a liberal or a cessationist to say that you believe I do these things, and believe in the gifts, but don’t know how to move in them.’ I was shocked and shaken. I went out and bought \$700 worth of books (a lot for me at that time) and began reading everything I could on spiritual gifts and the baptism of the Holy Spirit.”

Randy tells how God led him step by step to a new understanding of the Christian life and to a worldwide ministry of “impartation” through the laying on of hands. This term and this practice are obscure to most Christians, yet the laying on of hands is listed as one of the six foundational doctrines of the church in Hebrews 6:1-2, and it is referred to in the book of Acts and in several epistles of the New Testament. Randy is a brilliant theologian and church historian, his breadth borders on genius, in my opinion, but his humility and his love and respect for all of the church is apparent throughout his teaching.

In 1994 God used Randy to set a little church afire with the Spirit, the Toronto Airport Vineyard, and the revival that started there has impacted many thousands of lives. A couple of testimonies related to the impartation of the Holy Spirit, and these stores are greatly abbreviated:

ANIBAL MINDYK, ARGENTINA – I received a word from the Lord through Randy in Argentina in 1996. He said I would go to many countries with signs and wonders and would be a prophet of fire. That night an angel came with a torch of fire and made me swallow it. It burnt my mouth and throat. Then I could not walk for 22 days without being slain in the spirit. Every little sin was magnified 1000 times. People would have to hold me up to preach, then everyone in the church would fall down and laugh and laugh. In the first meeting a woman with bone cancer had her arm in a cast, eaten away with cancer, and she was totally healed. Many miracles, signs and wonders have continued. (By the way, the institutional church in the U.S. has a narrow list of what the Holy Spirit is permitted to do. In some churches, His presence can cause someone to weep, quietly, at the proper time and under control, but He would never, never cause someone to laugh! Whatever the disciples were doing on the day of Pentecost that made the crowd think they were drunk, they would be promptly escorted out of our churches today. “Embarrassing emotionalism! That most certainly can’t be God!)

JIM MANDEL, PHILADELPHIA, PA. - In 1999, Jim was a businessman making about \$500,000 a year, but he was addicted to alcohol and marijuana. When he was 34 he experienced the Lord in a powerful way when Evangelist Bob Shuttles prayed and laid hands on him....”I shot back six feet like I was hit with lightning...and laid for about 2 hours shaking uncontrollably...and that night had a vision of being taken into heaven.” In 2003 he attended a conference in Harrisburg, and when Randy Clark laid his hands on him he had another experience of electricity, shaking, weakness, etc. Right after this impartation, he went to India and saw a crippled man totally healed; many blind eyes and deaf ears opened; cancer, diabetes, paralysis and AIDS were all healed, and his ministry has continued all around the world.

ROLLAND AND HEIDI BAKER, UGANDA, AFRICA – Randy laid his hands on this couple and prophesied over them in 1995. The anointing and power that came on them was amazing. Rolland and Heidi had worked among the poor day and night for 17 years and had only been able to start 4 churches, but after this impartation they went back to Uganda and in a few years 6,000 churches were birthed (I just read that it has now grown to 7,000 churches). Heidi says she goes into Muslim villages with a group of ragtag orphans that were rescued from the streets, and when she starts preaching the people start cursing and throwing stones at them. She cries out, “Bring me your blind and deaf and crippled.” When someone comes bringing someone who is blind, etc., she prays and instantly blind eyes and deaf ears are opened, and the attitude of the villagers instantly changes. *(One of the basic purposes of signs and wonders, including healing, is evangelism. It was true for Jesus, for His apostles, and for all believers ever since then. “Oh, surely we aren’t expected to do the things that Jesus did!” No, we are expected to do greater things than He did. (John 14:12)*

HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS OF SIGNS AND WONDERS - If these reports are too much for you, read in Randy's book about what happened normally throughout history when God has renewed His church. I will skip over a multitude of historical reports and mention John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Some excerpts from Wesley's journal: "The next Saturday at Weaver's Hall a young man was suddenly seized with a violent trembling. In a few minutes, the sorrows of his heart increased and he sank down to the ground....Thursday, at Newgate, as I was preaching, immediately one, then another, and another sank to the earth. They dropped on every side as if thunderstruck...At Baldwin Street in May my voice could scarcely be heard amid the groanings of some and cries of others. A Quaker who stood by was greatly displeased at the commotion and was biting his lips and scowling angrily. Suddenly he dropped down as if thunderstruck. The agony he was in was terrible to behold. We begged God not to charge him with his follyand soon he lifted his head and cried aloud, 'Now I know you are a prophet of the Lord!'" The manifestations of the Holy Spirit during John Wesley's meetings were so common that he became controversial to the Church of England and was not permitted in any of their pulpits, although he was an ordained clergyman and missionary from that denomination. John Wesley and George Whitefield reported healings and confrontations with the demonic as a common occurrence during the course of their ministries.

Randy Clark says that it was obvious that power was present in Jesus' ministry to heal and deliver, but because His actions did not fit the accepted theology of the Pharisees, they said He was doing those things by the power of Beelzebub, a ruling demon. They said He was a blasphemer, glutton and drunkard, as well as being mad. That is, they tried to destroy His credibility through personal attacks rather than deal with what He had to say and the things He did, including healing lepers, opening blind eyes, and raising the dead. In like manner, John Wesley and George Whitefield, the key leaders of the Great Evangelical Revival of England of the 18th Century, were accused of having a white powder up their sleeves that caused people to fall under their hands as they ministered. Critics of current revival claim that demonstrations of power are either demonic or are the result of psychological manipulation and suggestion.

Bill Johnson, pastor of Bethel Church in Redding, California, says in his book, When Heaven Invades Earth, that many who have feared the excesses made by others in the name of faith have ironically embraced unbelief. Reaction to error usually produces error. Some people would have no belief system were it not for the errors of others. The word balance has come to mean middle of the road – of no threat to people or the devil, with little risk, and above all, the best way to keep our nice image intact. The church warns its members about the great sin of presumption. God warns us of the sin of unbelief. Jesus did not say, "When I return will I find people who are excessive and presumptuous?" He was concerned about finding people with faith, the kind He displayed. Unbelief is safe because it takes no risks and almost always gets what it expects. Then, after a person gets the answer for their unbelief, they can say, I told you so.

Bill says: The spirit of antichrist is at work today, attempting to influence believers to reject everything that has to do with the Holy Spirit's anointing. This takes many forms,

but boils down to this: we reject what we can't control. That spirit has worked to reduce the gospel to a mere intellectual message, rather than a super-natural God encounter. A **religious spirit** is a demonic presence that works to get us to substitute being led by our intellect instead of the Spirit of God. Being led by the Holy Spirit is an ongoing God encounter. Religion idolizes concepts and avoids personal experience. It substitutes reading the Bible, honoring the Bible, knowing the Bible, for doing the things the Bible tells us to do. When John Wimber became a Christian and started attending a denominational church, he asked a leader one day, "When are we going to start doing the stuff?" "What stuff?" the leader responded. "You know, the stuff the Bible talks about: healing the sick, feeding the poor, casting out demons, doing miracles?" "Oh," the man said, "We don't do those things, we just study about them." Without intending to, John started a church that became a denomination, the Vineyard, and it was founded on the conviction that we can and should "do the stuff."

More from Bill: We increase our knowledge of the Bible to feel good about our standing with God, and to better equip us to argue with those who disagree with us. Those who first appear to be under control may, in fact, be out of control – His control! Jesus did not say, "My sheep will know my book." It is His voice that we are to know. Why the distinction? Because anyone can know the Bible as a book – the devil himself knows and quotes the Scriptures. This is not to say that the Bible has little or no importance. The opposite is true. The Bible is the Word of God, and His voice will always be confirmed by Scripture, but many times God will lead us in ways that seem to contradict the Bible, because our understanding of Scripture becomes tied to our past experience and to the teaching of our denomination.

The **antichrist spirit** has a goal for the Church – embrace Jesus apart from the anointing. Without the anointing, He becomes a safe religious figure who is sure not to challenge or offend us. Paul described the deceptive possibility as "Having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away."

I am feeling refreshed and encouraged as I read books and listen to tapes from teachers like Randy and Bill. Frankly, normal church life in the United States is a long way from normal Christianity as presented in the New Testament. It is not even in the ballpark! It is not transforming our cities and our societies. It is not even transforming the lives of the people sitting in church – that is why the pollsters tell us there is no measurable difference between the church and the world (in the number of abortions, people living together without marriage, use of porn, divorce, substance addictions, gambling, dishonesty, etc.) It is not the challenging adventure that God designed our life to be. Why do you think young people who were raised in church almost universally drop out as soon as they are on their own? Young people, and especially young men, are hard-wired to risk it, as Pastor Dan Cox says. They are fearless, craving a challenge. They are searching for LIFE! And that is what Christ offers them, and us: Life, and life that is abundant.

AN AMAZING TESTIMONY AND AN APPEAL

Last spring Anne Adams from Austin, Texas, came to spend a week at the Bible School near Mexico City and ministered with Lynne Cumming and me. She was fascinated with the life and ministry of our friend Jose (Pepe) Quiroz, and she drew out of him some stories that I had never heard after being around him for about 20 years. I want to share a couple of those stories with you and then tell you about a need:

Pepe told about going to southern Mexico when he was a young evangelist. He went with an American pastor and his wife. False charges were raised against them by religious zealots, and he and the American pastor were arrested and thrown in jail. He told us that the American pastor was very afraid and cried out loud much of the time. The guards were laughing at him and taunting him because he was crying. I said, "My gosh, what a crybaby!" Pepe said, "You don't understand. In those days they did bad things to people who were put in jail for preaching the gospel." He then shared a story about what had happened to him and another Mexican pastor when they had been put in jail on a previous trip.

He said that the guards came into their cell every morning and beat them with fists and clubs. They became black and blue all over. Their heads were swollen to twice normal size. The guards beat them every morning for 15 days. Then, one day as night was coming on, they took them up into the high mountains to a remote place, removed their shoes and clothes except for their shorts, and left them there. The nights in those mountains are below freezing. The two of them started shaking with cold, and they huddled together for warmth all night to keep from freezing. The next day they started trying to walk back to civilization. Their feet became bruised and full of cactus spines. They had to spend a second night on the mountain. On the next day some people found them, took pity on them, and took them to their home. The people were afraid to let the police know that they were helping them. Pepe had an infection inside his mouth from the beatings and thought he would die or lose his voice. The people spent hours pulling cactus spines out of their feet and legs. The people called a phone number the other pastor provided, and some Christian friends came and took them back to a refuge where they could spend many weeks healing.

I told Pepe I could now understand why the American pastor was crying, that I would probably be crying and sucking my thumb. We then asked Pepe what happened to him and the American pastor when they were put in jail. He said he got very angry at the guards for laughing and taunting the other pastor, and that night he pointed at them through the bars and said, "God will shut your mouths!" He said that much to his surprise both guards became frozen in position like statues. They could not move nor speak. They remained that way for a long time, their eyes looking sideways at Pepe with terror, until Pepe spoke some words releasing them. (This sounds like the book of Acts, doesn't it?) The next morning both guards came in looking fearful and gaunt. They apparently had not slept all night. They went in to see the Chief and told him that Pepe had used witchcraft on them and they better get him out of their jail. (It wasn't witchcraft, it was the same power that St. Paul used when he caused blindness to come on Elymas the sorcerer in Acts 13:11.) They were promptly released from jail.

Now let me share a need that has arisen: It takes a great deal of money to support Pepe's ministry – just think of the cost of taking care of 45 orphans, and a drug-rehab center, and a weekly radio program in Mexico City, etc. I am so glad that the Vineyard

Church I attend believes in missions, has a large missions budget, and has included Pepe in their missions giving program. Praise the Lord! An American businessman who is a friend of Pepe's has also been giving generously to that ministry, many thousands of dollars. The businessman is now in a tight situation and is having to stop his monthly contribution. This will be a major problem.

I know that all of us are giving to many causes and get desperate appeals for funds constantly. I get tired of it. (And I want to thank those of you who gave to my ministry in these last 2 months. It really helped get me back on track. Thank you!) So please don't construe this paragraph as another desperate appeal. I just want to tell you of the need. Perhaps God will speak to someone and tell you to do something. Perhaps not. God will take care of the needs in one way or another, so I do not want to put any pressure on anybody. If you do feel led to help out at this time, you can send contributions to the Vineyard church here (for income tax purposes), and mark it for Jose Quiroz' ministry. No funds are subtracted by the church from contributions to missionaries. Thanks.

MINISTRY

On Friday, March 9, Jim Schnell and I drove 320 miles to a prison on I-25 in southern Colorado and had a tremendous weekend. Many people were praying, and the Holy Spirit visited the meeting in a special way on Saturday morning. I was praying for a huge black man who had severe back problems. His back started burning like fire, and he started jerking spasmodically. His back was healed! Then he said, "I see a cloud!" Wow, I know what that means! That signifies the presence of the Holy Spirit. I said, "I believe God is letting us know that He is here to heal, so everyone who needs healing, please come forward." About half of the men present came forward, and there were many wonderful healings. One inmate started laughing uncontrollably, and another started weeping loudly (I believe God was healing each man of inner pain and touching one with the joy of the Lord.) Let me report on Joe, a Hispanic man. He told me that he had suffered with migraine headaches constantly since the year 2000 when he was fighting some policemen and got beat up. Three or four ribs were broken, and a policeman hit him in the back of the head with a night-stick, giving him a concussion and resulting in ongoing problems with his sinuses. He said his nose was always stuffed up, and he had severe nose-bleeds almost daily. As we prayed, the migraine headache stopped instantly, and one side of his nose opened up. At the next session, he told us that at the end of the meeting as he walked back to his cell his nose started gushing with what he assumed was blood, but it was mucus. His sinuses drained, and now his nose was completely open. Everyone cheered and clapped for Jesus!

NOTE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN GOD'S GLORY AND DEMONSTRATIONS OF HIS POWER IN THE GOSPELS; *This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. (Turning water into wine.) He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in Him. (John 2:11)Jesus said, 'This sickness will not end in death. (The resurrection of Lazarus.) No, it is for God's glory, so that God's Son may be glorified through it. (John 11:4) Then, Jesus*

said, ‘*Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God.*’ (John 11:40)

You may remember Ila Crocker’s testimony in last month’s newsletter. She concluded her testimony of being instantly healed of inflammatory arthritis, with which she had suffered for 18 years, by saying that she was healed and remains healed....”**through the blood of Jesus Christ, my Savior! Hallelujah and praise be to His Name!**” In other words, she automatically gave praise to the Lord Jesus Christ for her healing. When someone accepts Christ in our churches, everyone spontaneously starts clapping and giving glory to God. Likewise, when someone is saved or healed or delivered from demonic power in church or in prison, everyone bursts into applause and expressions of praise. **When we obey God and pray for the sick and God heals them, that gives glory to God!**

When Jim and I checked into our motel, we were met by the manager, a young man from India named Mani. We learned that he was totally uninformed about the Christian faith, so we both talked briefly to him, and Jim made an appointment with him and did a great job in sharing the gospel. On Saturday night I asked if I could share with him, but he told me his 2 little girls (2 and 4 years old) were both very sick and vomiting. I asked if I could pray for them, and I simply stood with Mani in the office and prayed two or three sentences for them. The next morning as we were leaving Mani told us his little girls were much better, and he gave both of us a nice ball-point pen. I believe our testimonies were greatly reinforced through a simple prayer and Jesus’ answer in power.

God reveals his essential nature in the Bible through the use of a number of compound names, including: Jehovah-Tsidkenu (God our Righteousness), Jehovah-Shalom (God our Peace), Jehovah-Jirah (God our Provider), and Jehovah-Rapha (God our Healer). God never changes. He is still our righteousness, our peace, our provider, “but His healing gift was withdrawn at the end of the first century”! (That is what some Christians believe.) Ridiculous! *The gifts and calling of God are without repentance!* What He was, He is, and always will be. What He gave, He continues to give and always will. Give Him glory!