

The Purpose Driven Life

BOOK REVIEW by Jeremy Cagle

In 1988, Hugh S. Moorhead, professor of philosophy at Northeastern Illinois University, published a book entitled *The Meaning of Life*.¹ In the book, he interviewed 250 famous scholars and asked them the question: “What is the meaning or purpose of life?”² Among those interviewed were some of the most brilliant minds of the 20th Century: Leonard Bernstein, E.E. Cummings, T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, Bertrand Russell, and Paul Tillich, to name a few. Here is how they answered the question

To your question what is the meaning of purpose of life, read all the great poems of the world and you still won't find out. But read them anyway as if you could. Life keeps its secrets.³

I do not know the meaning or *purpose* of life. But I'm convinced that mankind is engaged in a creative process of the kind that Saint Bernard had in mind for the Cistercian monks.⁴

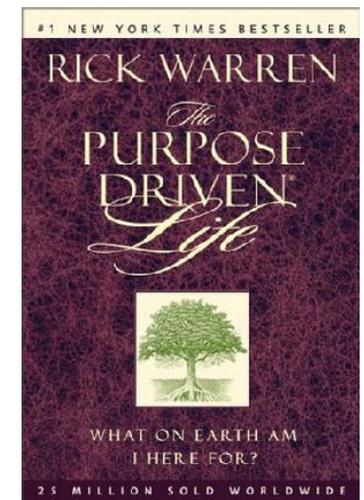
I do not think there can be any general answer to the question, what is the meaning of life? Our individual lives have whatever meaning, or meanings, we succeed in giving them.⁵

I have never found the meaning of life.⁶

There may well be no “purpose.”⁷

I'm afraid the meaning of life still eludes me.⁸

Sad to say, I don't really know what the purpose or meaning of life is...do you? If so, please advise. It would come in most handy to have the answer to that question.⁹



“What is the meaning or purpose of life?” may be the most important question ever asked. Nothing else matters if that question cannot be answered. As one of my philosophy professors used to say, “If this question is unanswerable, then there is nothing to keep us from committing suicide.” In other words, if we do not know why we are here, then there is nothing to keep us from total despair.

And yet the answers of these brilliant minds are staggering!¹⁰ The 20th Century’s most influential philosophers, scientists, psychologists, and poets are dumbfounded as to “the meaning or purpose of life.” Which leads us to wonder, “Is there anything to keep us from total despair?”

Rick Warren, founding pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, has written *The Purpose-Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here for?* to answer this all-encompassing question. And, apparently, people have liked his answer. Published in 2002 by Zondervan, *The Purpose-Driven Life* spent several weeks at the top of the New York Times Bestseller list and sold more than 15 million copies.¹¹ Since the book’s original publication, the “purpose-driven” logo has been trademarked¹² and the book has led to the creation of a purpose-driven website,¹³ *The Purpose-Driven Life Journal*,¹⁴ *The Purpose-Driven Life*

Devotional, *The Purpose-Driven Life Album*, *The Purpose-Driven Life Video Curriculum*, and *The Purpose-Driven Life Health Assessment*.¹⁵

In fact, it has hard to go anywhere in America and not find someone who is familiar with the phrase “purpose-driven.”¹⁶ It is used today in business.¹⁷ It is used in politics.¹⁸ And it is used in the church.¹⁹

Some of the reason for *The Purpose-Driven Life*’s immense popularity comes as a result of the popularity of Rick Warren’s first book, *The Purpose-Driven Church*.²⁰ After its publication, *The Purpose-Driven Church* sold more than a million copies, was translated into 20 different languages, and was selected as one of the 100 Christian Books that Changed the 20th Century.²¹ So, needless to say, Rick Warren has made quite an attempt to answer the question, “What is the meaning or purpose of life?” He has attempted to answer it in the arena of the church. And he has attempted to answer it in the arena of our personal lives.

It is because of the immense popularity of his ideas that this book review is being written. Although *The Purpose-Driven Life* is 10 years old now and is not as contemporary as many other Christian books that could be reviewed, its ideas are still popular in 2012. In fact, as was just mentioned, some

of these ideas were thought to have changed the last century.²² Therefore, I thought it was necessary to place a review of *The Purpose-Driven Life* in

this year’s edition of /jst/.

So what was Rick Warren’s answer to the question? “What is the meaning or purpose of life?”

Content.

The Purpose-Driven Life answers the question by taking the reader on a 334 page, 40-day journey. In Warren’s own words,

This is more than a book; it is a guide to a 40-day spiritual journey that will enable you to discover the answer to life’s most important question: What on earth am I here for? 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. Having this perspective will reduce your stress, simplify your decisions, increase your satisfaction, and, most important, prepare you for eternity.²³

The author is so passionate about this claim that he asks his audience to sign a covenant committing to apply these principles for the next 40 days.²⁴ He also makes the claim that “it is no accident that you are holding this book”²⁵ and that “the next 40 days will transform your life.”²⁶

To take this one step further, he encourages people to not just read the book but interact with it, underline it,

and write their thoughts in it. “Make it your book. Personalize it!”²⁷ Later in the book, readers are even asked to construct their own purpose statement based on what they have learned from the 40 days,²⁸ to pass this book along to others,²⁹ and to form a reading group where they review these principles on a weekly basis.³⁰ Needless to say, Rick Warren has written a book that intends to do more than just solve the riddle of the meaning of life. He has written a book that seeks to *change the lives* of his audience.

The Purpose-Driven Life is divided into 40 days under the heading of five purposes. The purposes are all intended to answer the question, “What is the Purpose of Life?” The days read like chapters in a book and include subjects such as “It All Starts with God,” “Becoming Best Friends with God,” “How We Grow,” “Thinking Like a Servant,” and “Becoming a World-Class Christian.” There is not enough time to look at each of the 40

days but here is a summary of the five purposes of life.

Purpose #1 is “You were Planned for God’s Pleasure.” The opening paragraph under this section reads,

You were planned for God’s pleasure.

The moment you were born into the world, God was there as an unseen witness, *smiling* at your birth. He wanted you alive, and your arrival gave him great pleasure. God did not *need* to create you, but he *chose* to create you for his own enjoyment. You exist for his benefit, his glory, his purpose, and his delight.³¹

According to Warren, “It’s not about you.”³² Life has a higher calling than our own personal satisfaction. Life is intended to point to something greater than us. We were made to please God, not ourselves.

To highlight this truth, the book talks at length about worship. Worship is the way in which we bring pleasure to God and it involves music but much more than just music. Worship involves praying, reading Scripture, listening to sermons, giving an offering, being baptized, and taking communion.³³ And it does not stop there. “Worship is not a *part* of your life; it *is* your life.”³⁴ Everything a Christian does from the moment he wakes up until the moment he goes to sleep is an act of worshipping God. “This is the secret to a lifestyle of worship – doing everything as if you

were doing it for Jesus.”³⁵

Purpose #2 is “You Were Formed for God’s Family.” This section begins,

You were formed for God’s family.

God wants a family, and he created you to be a part of it. This is God’s second purpose for your life, which he planned before you were born. The entire Bible is the story of God building a family who will love him, honor him, and reign with him forever.³⁶

The second purpose of life is to become a part of the church. Not only were human beings created to please God independently, they were also created to please God corporately. Yes, people should worship God with their individual lives, but they should also worship God together as a family.

The book ties this directly into the doctrine of salvation. “Every human being was *created* by God, but not everyone is a *child* of God.”³⁷ Membership in the family of God is only for Christians. It is only for those who have been saved. “The only way to get into God’s family is by being born again into it.”³⁸

Purpose #3 is “You Were Created to Become Like Christ.” As Warren puts it,

You were created to become like Christ.

From the very beginning, God’s plan has been to make you like his Son,

Jesus. This is your destiny and the third purpose of your life. God announced this intention at Creation: “*Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image and likeness.’*”³⁹

Not only is the purpose of life found in living for God’s pleasure and in joining His family, it is also found in becoming more and more like His Son. We worship God by imitating the life of Jesus Christ.

“It is the Holy Spirit’s job to produce Christ-like character in you.”⁴⁰ The Spirit makes believers more like Jesus. And there are several ways that He does that. According to *The Purpose-Driven life*, He makes believers more like Jesus as they cooperate with His work. He makes them more Jesus as He molds them with His Word, with people, and with circumstances. And He makes them more like Jesus through a long, slow process.⁴¹ “Spiritual maturity is neither instant nor automatic; it is a gradual, progressive development that will take the rest of your life.”⁴²

Purpose #4 is “You Were Shaped for Serving God.” The fourth purpose is described this way,

You were put on earth to make a contribution.

You weren’t created just to consume resources – to eat, breathe, and take up space. God designed you to make a difference with your life...You were created to *add* to life on earth, not just

take from it. God wants you to give something back. This is God’s fourth purpose for your life, and it is called your “ministry,” or service.⁴³

The author takes the idea that “It’s not about you” one step further and explains that another purpose of life is to serve others. God created us to assist in meeting the needs of someone else.

The fourth purpose then goes on to explain how Christians should live with eternity in mind. They should live in light of eternity because their service to others will be rewarded in eternity, not here on earth. “At the end of your life on earth you will stand before God, and he is going to evaluate how well you served others with your life.”⁴⁴ That frightening reminder should motivate us to give more time, more energy, and more resources to invest in others. We should worship God through service.

Purpose #5 is “You Were Made for a Mission.” The fifth and final purpose of life is that men and women were created to fulfill a mission. As the book states,

You were made for a mission.

God is at work in the world, and he wants you to join him. This assignment is called your *mission*. God wants you to have both a ministry in the Body of Christ and a mission in the world. Your ministry is your service to *believers*, and your mission is your service to *unbelievers*. Fulfilling your mission in the world is

God's fifth purpose for your life.⁴⁵

Christians were created to reach the world for Christ. Warren calls this their "mission" but it is also known as "evangelism."

Evangelism is listed as an important component to fulfilling life's purpose for several reasons. For one, evangelism continues Jesus' mission on earth. The Lord evangelized when He was here

with us and we now have the chance to continue His work. Another reason is that evangelism has eternal significance. To tell someone the message of salvation is to change their eternal destiny and there is nothing more fulfilling than that. Finally, God's timetable for the conclusion of history is directly tied to evangelism.⁴⁶ "What we *do* know for sure is this: Jesus will not return until everyone God wants to hear the Good News has heard it."⁴⁷

Evaluation of Content.

The content in *The Purpose-Driven Life* has several strengths. One strength is that it is very engaging. (It must be to sell so many copies!) It captures the reader's attention at the beginning and holds it until the very end.

In the humble opinion of this reviewer, there are two reasons for this. (1). The book attempts to tackle the all-encompassing question: "What is the meaning or purpose of life?" *The Purpose-Driven Life* is a popular book because *The Purpose-Driven Life* answers a question that everyone is asking.

(2). The book attempts to answer this question in a concise fashion. People today are busy. They do not have time to read 1,000 pages of philosophy. But they do have time to commit to 40 days.

They do have time to read a 334 page book with large print. Therefore, the very concept of *The Purpose-Driven Life* is captivating to a modern audience. Here is the meaning of life in just a little more than a month! Here is the purpose of my existence in just a few hundred pages. Who wouldn't want that?

The book is also engaging because of its style. For example, every day starts off with a brief statement that reaches out and grabs you. Here are statements from the first ten days:

It's not about you.⁴⁸

You are not an accident.⁴⁹

Everyone's life is driven by something.⁵⁰

This life is not all that there is.⁵¹

The way you *see* your life *shapes* your life.⁵²

Life on earth is a temporary assignment.⁵³

It's all for him.⁵⁴

You were planned for God's pleasure.⁵⁵

The smile of God is the goal of your life.⁵⁶

The heart of worship is surrender.⁵⁷

Again, people are busy. They do not have time to wade through several chapters before an author says something worth reading. If modern books do not get to the point quick, modern readers will close the book quick. And, with that in mind, Rick Warren gets straight to the point. He begins every day with a clear and concise summary of what he intends to say and then he says it. And it draws the reader in.

A second strength of the book is some of its "key Christian themes."⁵⁸ *The Purpose-Driven Life* captures some very important Biblical doctrines and communicates them very succinctly. Towards the end of the book, the author summarizes the five purposes by relating them back to Jesus' Great Commandment in Matthew 22:37-40 and His Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20.

1. "Love God with all your heart": You were planned for God's pleasure, so your

purpose is to love God through *worship*.

2. "Love your neighbor as yourself": You were shaped for serving, so your purpose is to show love for others through *ministry*.

3. "Go and make disciples": You were made for a mission, so your purpose is to share God's message through *evangelism*.

4. "baptize them into...": You were formed for God's family, so your purpose is to identify with his church through *fellowship*.⁵⁹

5. "teach them to do all things...": You were created to become like Christ, so your purpose is to grow to maturity through *discipleship*.⁶⁰

No Christian scholar would disagree with the importance of each of these five points. Every Biblical church emphasizes worship, ministry, evangelism, fellowship, and discipleship. And it is a strength of *The Purpose-Driven Life* to do the same.

Another key Christian theme that is promoted in the book is that of grace. Warren writes,

This verse [Philippians 2:13], written to believers, is not about how to be saved, but how to grow. It does not say, "*work for*" your salvation, because you can't add anything to what Jesus already did. During a physical "workout," you exercise to develop your body, not to get a body.⁶¹

The book rightly concludes that salva-

tion is all a work of God's grace.⁶² Man does not contribute to his salvation in any way. Just as a workout does not give us a body, so working out our faith does not give us salvation.

Warren also does a good job of explaining how it takes a long time for a believer to grow in Christ.

But real maturity is never the result of a single experience, no matter how powerful or moving. Growth is gradual... There is only one way to develop the habits of Christlike character: You must *practice* them – and that takes time!

Biblical Content.

One serious weakness in *The Purpose-Driven Life* is the frequent misuse of Scripture. This is quite a problem in a book that claims to use “over a thousand different verses from fifteen English translations and paraphrases.”⁶⁴ This is also quite a serious accusation for such a popular book but several examples of this can be cited.⁶⁵

On page 139, Warren quotes Matthew 18:20, which says, “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” and uses it to encourage those who meet in small group studies to know that God is with them. The problem with this is that the context of the passage is

There are no *instant habits*.⁶³

As a believer, maturity does not happen overnight. It is a gradual thing. It takes time. Christians must learn to wait on God's timing to become more like Jesus.

So there are several strengths to *The Purpose-Driven Life*. It is very engaging and it explains several key Christian themes in a succinct, comprehensible manner. But there are some considerable weaknesses to the book and the next sections of this review will discuss those.

church discipline, not small group Bible study (see Matt 18:15-18). Jesus gave this promise to the church to remind them that, whenever they confront a Christian in sin, He will be with them. He did not give this promise to say that He is with believers whenever they come together for Bible Study.⁶⁶

Another misuse of Scripture is found on page 31 where *The Purpose-Driven Life* wrongly interprets Jeremiah 29:11 to say that God is going to give the reader hope and a good future if he discovers the purpose of his life. At first glance, Jeremiah 29:11 seems to say something to that effect when it says,

“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.”

But if the context of Jeremiah's prophecy is taken into account, we discover that it was written to the Israelites who had been exiled in Babylon (see Jer 29:1-4). In other words, Jeremiah 29:11 is a promise to Jews who are living under the judgment of God in exile, not to people today who are searching for their life's purpose.⁶⁷

Pages 237-238 give another misinterpretation of Scripture. In these pages, the author quotes Proverbs 27:19, which says, “As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man,” and uses it to say that the reader should listen to his heart. “Listening for inner promptings can point to the ministry God intends for you to have.”⁶⁸ Again, the problem with this interpretation is that it was not the intention of the author of Proverbs. This verse simply says that a man's heart shows who he is, not that a man should listen to his heart. Warren's interpretation of this verse also violates the teaching of other passages such as Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” The Prophet Jeremiah says that you *should not* listen to your heart, not that you *should*.

Not only does the book frequently misinterpret Scripture, but Rick Warren often uses paraphrase translations in *The Purpose-Driven Life*. A paraphrase translation is a translation that seeks to communicate the thought of the authors of Scripture rather than the literal words of Scripture. To say that another way, a paraphrase translation changes the wording of the original authors to try and make them clearer for a modern audience. In doing so, they create more of an *interpretation* of the Bible rather than a *translation* of the Bible. Since they do not attempt to communicate the literal words, paraphrase translators often put their own words into the text and come up with a running commentary instead of an actual translation of the Word of God.⁶⁹

While this kind of approach to the Bible can be helpful for devotional study, it can also be very dangerous as the translations are often inaccurate. A good example of this is found on page 232 of *The Purpose-Driven Life*.⁷⁰ Here Warren quotes from the Message translation of First Corinthians 12:14, 19,

I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less... because of what you are a part of.

Compare this to the New American Standard Bible translation of the same verse (the New American Standard

Bible is a literal translation):

For the body is not one member, but many...If they were all one member, where would the body be?

The two translations are nothing alike. The Message says that Christians are made more significant because they are now a part of the church. While that may be true, that was never Paul's intention in writing this passage. A literal translation shows that Paul's intention is to show the Corinthians that the individual members of the body are insignificant compared to the rest of the body. If the body were all about one member, it would all fall apart. If it were just a hand or a foot or an eye or an ear, it would be useless (see 1 Cor 12:15-18). The only way for the body to function correctly is for all of the members to serve one another.

In other words, First Corinthians 12:14, 19 are not talking about a person's significance but about a person's service. The Message translation of this verse is not a translation at all. It is an interpretation. And it is an interpretation that gets the meaning of the verse wrong. Paul was not trying to build the Corinthian's sense of significance as he wrote this. He was trying to take their sense of significance away and replace it with a sense of the significance of others.

This generous use of paraphrase translations is unsettling as you read *The*

Purpose-Driven Life. One wonders whether Rick Warren was trying to understand the meaning of Scripture or whether he was looking for a few translations to agree with what he already thought. To add to this, in Appendix 3, he writes:

Also, since the verse divisions and number were not included in the Bible until 1560 A.D., I haven't always quoted the *entire* verse, but rather focused on the phrase that was appropriate. My model for this is Jesus and how he and the apostles quoted the Old Testament. They often just quoted a phrase to make a point.⁷¹

While Warren is exactly right that Jesus and the apostles did not always quote from an entire verse,⁷² it is disturbing that he admits to writing a book full of partially quoted paraphrase translations. In other words, the Bible research behind *The Purpose-Driven Life* is mostly comprised of phrases quoted from other men's interpretations of the Bible. As Nathan Busenitz writes,

Our biggest concern with *The Purpose-Driven Life* is that, although it frequently references the Bible, it often does so inaccurately...With no less than fifteen different Bible translations and paraphrases, Warren offers proof-texts for much of his discussion usually without any exegetical or contextual support. The author explains his reasons for this on page 325 contending that his "model for this is Jesus and how he and the apostles quoted the Old

Testament..."

Unfortunately, this thinking (which is debatable to begin with) allows Warren to pull passages completely out of context and apply them however he sees fit (using whatever loose paraphrase seems to agree with his argument). But unlike Jesus and the apostles, Warren is not inspired by the Holy Spirit – meaning he does not possess the ability to use God's Word however he pleases.⁷³

This all leads us to ask the question, "Is *The Purpose-Driven Life* based on what the Bible says or is it based on what Rick Warren says?" "Is it based on the Word of God or is it based on the word of man?" And the answer, in the view of this reviewer: "It is made up of a dangerous mixture of both."

A second weakness of *The Purpose-Driven Life* is its unbalanced presentation of the Gospel. The Gospel is "the joyous good news of salvation in Jesus Christ."⁷⁴ The Gospel is the good news that sinners can now be saved from eternal damnation in Hell. It is the proclamation that men can go to Heaven through the sacrificial death of the Son of God. How is that proclamation given in a book about "the meaning or purpose of life?" Page 58 says,

Right now, God is inviting you to live for his glory by fulfilling the purposes he made you for. It's really the only way to live. Everything else is just *existing*. Real life begins by committing yourself completely to Jesus Christ. If you are not sure you have done this, all you need

to do is *receive* and *believe*...

First, believe. Believe God loves you and made you for his purposes. Believe you're not an accident...

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...Wherever you are reading this, I invite you to bow your head and quietly whisper the prayer that will change your eternity: "*Jesus, I believe in you and I receive you.*" Go ahead.

If you sincerely meant that prayer, congratulations! Welcome to the family of God! You are now ready to discover and start living God's purpose for your life.⁷⁵

To be clear, the Bible definitely says that we must believe the message of Jesus Christ in order to be saved (Rom 10:9-10). The Bible also says that Christians receive salvation (Jn 1:12; Rom 5:17). Warren is right about that. Eternal life is a free gift that is given to those who believe and, as a free gift, those who believe receive it.

But, in order to truly believe and receive this message, a lost person must do a lot of other things to experience the saving mercies of God. He must deny himself (Luke 9:23). He must love Jesus Christ above all other earthly relations (Matt 10:37-39) and above all earthly possessions (Lk 14:33). He must repent of his sins (Lk 13:3). He must count the cost (Lk 14:28-33).

And yet none of this is mentioned in *The Purpose-Driven Life* in connection with salvation. The reader is asked to believe that God has a purpose for him, receive Jesus' forgiveness, and pray a prayer. Then he is welcomed into the family of God.

To add to the confusion on this issue, *The Purpose-Driven Life* rarely mentions sin,⁷⁶ holiness, or the reason for Jesus' death on the cross.⁷⁷ Everything offensive is left out of the proclamation of salvation and the reader is told to believe in a God Who is never said to be holy to forgive him for sins that he is never said to have committed. This brings to mind Walter Chantry's famous statement that "When a half truth is presented as a whole truth, it becomes an untruth."⁷⁸ Rick Warren

asks his readers to believe in the inoffensive parts of the Gospel but not the offensive parts.⁷⁹ And, in doing so, he does not ask them to believe in the "whole truth." He asks them to believe in an "untruth."⁸⁰ As one author wrote,

Warren would be hard-pressed to find biblical backing for this presentation of the gospel. We find nothing here about sin, grace, repentance, the Person of Christ, Calvary, faith, judgment, or the resurrection. This is the ultimate in a mutilated, seeker-sensitive gospel: the *seeker* comes to Christ in order to find his purpose in life, not to receive forgiveness from sin and the righteousness of God. Then, to pronounce someone a full-fledged member of the family of God because he has prayed such a prayer (based on minimal, if any, understanding of the person and work of Christ) is beyond tragic.⁸¹

And the book shows its consistency by saying that the Bible should speak for itself and then allowing it to do so with these five main purposes.

The Purpose-Driven Life also shows its consistency by reiterating this theme of the importance of the Bible all throughout the book. Day 24 is entitled, "Transformed by Truth" and it explains how the truth of God's Word can transform lives. In this chapter,

Warren provides a lot of good insights about the importance of Bible study and the impact it should have on those who study. "To be a healthy disciple of Jesus, feeding on God's Word must be your first priority."⁸³ "We can't watch television for three hours, then read the Bible for three minutes and expect to grow."⁸⁴ "As D. L. Moody said, 'The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives.'"⁸⁵

Concerning the inconsistencies in *The Purpose-Driven Life*, one concerns this same statement that "The best way to explain God's purpose for your life is to allow Scripture to speak for itself." With so much misinterpretation of Scripture and so many paraphrase translations, it is clear that this is not a book where the Scripture is allowed to speak for itself in any and every way.

On top of this, there are a lot of mystical ideas in *The Purpose-Driven Life*. Mysticism is the doctrine that God speaks to a person internally, with no outside help. As Arthur L. Johnson writes,

When we speak of a mystical experience, we refer to an event that is completely within the person. It is totally subjective...It contains no essential aspects that exist externally to him in the physical world.⁸⁶

While every Christian understands that God gives information to man

through creation,⁸⁷ mysticism teaches that God gives certain men information through their emotions or through their inner impulses without the use of nature or without the use of the Bible. In doing so, mysticism denies the sufficiency⁸⁸ and completion of Scripture.⁸⁹

With that said, Rick Warren shows his inconsistency when he says, on the one hand, that Scripture should speak for itself and, on the other hand, that God still speaks outside of Scripture. Consider some of the following statements:

God wants you to use your natural interests to serve him and others. Listening for inner promptings can point you to the ministry God intends for you to have.⁹⁰

God has given you a Life Message to share...You have a storehouse of experiences that God wants to use to bring others into his family.⁹¹

That means other people are going to find healing in your wounds. Your greatest life messages and your most effective ministry will come out of your deepest hurts.⁹²

While some of these statements are true (God can use your natural interests and your experiences to serve Him and bring others into His family), each statement also places experience on the same level as Scripture. Each statement claims or, at the very least insinuates,

Consistency.

The Purpose-Driven Life is consistent and inconsistent on several fronts. Concerning its consistency, the author makes the claim at the start of the book that "The best way to explain God's purpose for your life is to allow the Scripture to speak for itself."⁸² In regards to the book's five main purposes, Warren follows through with this claim. Worship, ministry, evangelism, fellowship, and discipleship are all important Biblical concepts.

that God will use you and speak to you and minister to you without the agency of the Bible. And that is mysticism.

A third inconsistency in *The Purpose-Driven Life* also concerns the author's statement that "The best way to explain God's purpose for your life is to allow Scripture to speak for itself." In claiming to allow Scripture to speak for itself, Warren regularly uses labels and concepts from secular psychology instead of from the Bible. Sin and the holiness of God are almost never referred to but emotional healing and codependency and stress relief are mentioned over and over and over again in the book.

For instance, Gideon is said to suffer from low self-esteem⁹³ and Samson from codependency.⁹⁴ When restoring a broken relationship, readers are encouraged to tell the offended party how they feel and to meet their "unmet needs."⁹⁵ In another portion, emotional health is mentioned as a benefit for fellowship with God's people.⁹⁶ The author also mentions how God uses weak people, even though they may have emotional or relational limitations.⁹⁷ None of this allows Scripture to speak for itself or to define its own terms. If anything, all of this shows how *The Purpose-Driven Life* takes worldly ideas and mixes them with

Biblical ones.

The strongest psychological statement that Warren makes in *The Purpose-Driven Life* is that "Bitterness is the greatest barrier to friendship with God."⁹⁸ That is not what the Bible says at all. The Bible says that *sin* is the greatest barrier to friendship with God,⁹⁹ whether that sin be in the form of bitterness or something else. And yet the word "sin" is removed here and replaced with the word "bitterness." Such an attempt to replace Biblical ideas with psychological ones shows that Warren is being very inconsistent.

A fourth inconsistency in the book concerns its opening statement that, "It's not about you."¹⁰⁰ With this opening statement, *The Purpose-Driven Life* attempts to show that "the meaning or purpose of life" is not found in serving yourself. In fact, Day 1 is entitled "It All Starts with God" and relates how we were created for God's pleasure and not for our own pleasure.

While that is very good theology, the rest of the book seems to contradict this message. In fact, the word "you" is probably used more than any other word in *The Purpose-Driven Life*. Here are some examples of its use:

Having this perspective will reduce your stress, simplify your decisions, increase

your satisfaction, and, most important, prepare you for eternity.¹⁰¹

Any time you reject part of yourself, you are rejecting God's wisdom and sovereignty in creating you.¹⁰²

God even enjoys watching you sleep!... When you are sleeping, God gazes at you with love, because you were his idea. He loves you as if you were the only person on earth.¹⁰³

If you want to know how much you matter to God, look at Christ with his arms outstretched on the cross, saying, "I love you this much! I'd rather die than live without you."¹⁰⁴

Sharing your testimony is an essential part of your mission on earth because it is unique. There is no other story just like yours, so only you can share it. If you don't share it, it will be lost forever. You may not be a Bible scholar, but you *are* the authority on your life.¹⁰⁵

If Rick Warren wants to send the message that the purpose of life is "not about you," then he needs to rewrite *The Purpose-Driven Life*. This book is full of statements that give the reader the impression that life is, indeed, all about you.

Scholarship.

The scholarship behind *The Purpose-Driven Life* is good in some areas. For instance, Rick Warren gathers information from a host of well-known people including Bertrand Russell,¹⁰⁶ Albert Einstein,¹⁰⁷ Thomas Carlyle,¹⁰⁸ Henry David Thoreau,¹⁰⁹ George Bernard Shaw,¹¹⁰ C. S. Lewis,¹¹¹ Matthew Henry,¹¹² A. W. Tozer,¹¹³ Philip Yancey,¹¹⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer,¹¹⁵ D. L. Moody,¹¹⁶ Madame Guyon,¹¹⁷ Martin Luther,¹¹⁸ Mother Teresa,¹¹⁹ and Aldous Huxley.¹²⁰ He also provides some very interesting facts about the brain,¹²¹ DNA,¹²² and human nature¹²³ to give insight into the various ideas in the book. As mentioned earlier, *The Purpose-Driven Life* also references over

a thousand verses and 15 different translations of the Bible.¹²⁴

The downside to all of this scholarship is that Rick Warren never shows the reader where he gets his information. With a few exceptions,¹²⁵ the only citations in the book are Bible citations. This is not to say that his information is inaccurate, but simply that it is uncited in the book. There is no way of knowing whether it is correct or not as it is unreferenced in his writings. There is also the problem of misinterpreting the Bible (as was mentioned above), which shows a poor scholastic approach to the numerous passages mentioned in the book.

A further danger in *The Purpose-Driven Life* is the testimonials from heretical figures like Madame Guyon¹²⁶ and Mother Teresa¹²⁷ concerning how to find God's purpose in life. This sends the message that both of these women were orthodox Christians and should be placed in the same category

as people like Matthew Henry and Martin Luther. It would be helpful for Warren to make a clear distinction between the advice given by secular and non-orthodox writers and the advice given by those who are sound in the faith.

CONCLUSION

Hugh S. Moorehead found very few answers to his question: "What is the meaning or purpose of life?" But Rick Warren offers some in *The Purpose-Driven Life*. Five to be exact. The purpose of life is to worship God, to minister to others, to evangelize the lost, to fellowship with other Christians, and to disciple other Christians. Each of these five purposes is Biblical and each of them helps to answer the all important question of the purpose of life.

The problem with Warren's material lies not in the purposes he mentions but in his explanation of them. By taking Scripture out of context, by minimizing sin and the holiness of God and Jesus' work on the cross, and by incorporating mysticism and psychology with the Bible, *The Purpose-Driven Life* leaves a lot to be desired.

Not only that but it also does not live up to its promises. In the opening pages, the author claims that the book will reduce stress, increase satisfaction,¹²⁸ and "transform your life."¹²⁹ While that may be the case with some readers, it was certainly not the case with this reviewer. And, furthermore, what does reduced stress and increased satisfaction have to do with living a Godly life? Did Jesus Christ reduce His stress by dying for our sins?¹³⁰ Did the Apostle Paul increase his satisfaction with all of the sacrifices he made for the church? Quite to the contrary! Consider his words in Second Corinthians 11:23-28,

Are they servants of Christ?...I more so... beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep.

I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers from the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.

Paul lived a life of purpose. Paul lived a Godly life. But his life was anything but stress-free and guaranteed to increase satisfaction.

It is not without warrant to say that

some people may benefit from reading *The Purpose-Driven Life* but the benefits would have to be minimal. In this book, Rick Warren frequently minimizes key doctrines of the faith and misunderstands the meaning of many passages of Scripture. Such an approach to "the meaning or purpose of life" cannot be very helpful to a believer or an unbeliever. As David Wells writes,

That is why a deep chasm has opened between the church marketers [such as Rick Warren] and historic Protestant orthodoxy. It is less that the truths of this orthodoxy are assailed than that they are seen to be irrelevant to the building of the church. They are, it is believed, an impediment to its success.¹³¹

End Notes

- 1 I am in-debted to Rick Warren for this introduction. He mentions this book on pages 19-20 of *The Purpose-Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).
- 2 Hugh S. Moorhead, *The Meaning of Life: According to Our Century's Greatest Writers and Thinkers* (Chicago, Ill.: Chicago Review Press, 1988) 1.
- 3 Richard Eberhart in *The Meaning of Life*, 54.
- 4 Rene Dubos in *The Meaning of Life*, 50.
- 5 A. J. Ayer in *The Meaning of Life*, 20.
- 6 James Thurber in *The Meaning of Life*, 196.
- 7 Carl Sagan in *The Meaning of Life*, 167.
- 8 Thomas Nagel in *The Meaning of Life*, 134.
- 9 Jessica Mitford in *The Meaning of Life*, 127.
- 10 Ibid., 148. To be fair to Moorehead's book, there were some good answers to the question, "What is the purpose or meaning of life?" Consider Alvin Plantiga's answer, which is essentially a quotation from the Heidelberg Catechism,

What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I, with body and soul, both in life and in

death, am not my own, but belong to my faith Savior Jesus Christ; who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from the power of the Devil...wherefore by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.

11 This information is available on the front cover of the book. By some estimates, the book has sold more copies than this.

12 This can be seen by the characteristic trademark symbol next to the phrase “purpose-driven” every time it appears in the book or in any of Rick Warren’s material.

13 The book has actually led to several different websites: www.purposedrivenlife.com, www.purposedriven.com, and www.pastors.com or www.purposedrivenchurch.com

14 *The Purpose-Driven Life*, 336.

15 These last items are promoted on pages 323-324 of *The Purpose-Driven Life*.

16 See George Barna’s article, “What is a Purpose-Driven Life to Americans?” at www.barna.org as of 3/13/12.

17 See John Jantsch’s article, “The Purpose Driven Business” at www.businessknowhow.com as of 3/13/12.

18 See Chuck Raasch’s article, “Warren’s Purpose-Driven Politics” at www.usatoday.com as of 3/13/12.

19 See the discussion of *The Purpose-Driven Church* below.

20 Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church: Every Church is Big in God’s Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

21 All of this information is available on the inside cover of the book.

22 *The Purpose-Driven Church* was listed as one of the 100 Books that Changed the 20th Century, not *The Purpose-Driven Life*. But the concepts in *The Purpose-Driven Church* are so closely tied to those in *The Purpose-Driven Life* that one could take them together as a whole. In this the thinking of this reviewer, both of them were influential in changing the 20th Century.

23 *The Purpose-Driven Life*, 9. All italics used in quotations are from the original source.

24 Ibid., 13.

25 Ibid., 5.

26 Ibid., 10.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 312-319. This is reminiscent of Stephen Covey’s *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (New York: Free Press, 1989) 106-109. Compare Rick Warren’s purpose statement to Stephen Covey’s (a secular self-help author) mission statement.

Rick Warren:

Unfortunately, it’s easy to get distracted and forget what is most important. It’s easy to drift away from what matters most and slowly get off course. To prevent this, you should develop a purpose statement for your life and then

review it regularly (*Purpose Driven Life*, 313).

Stephen Covey:

A personal mission statement based on correct principles becomes the...standard for an individual. It becomes a personal constitution, the basis for making daily decisions in the midst of the circumstances and emotions that affect our lives. It empowers individuals with the same timeless strength in the midst of change (*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, 108).

29 Ibid., 309-310.

30 Ibid., 307. This is reminiscent of Dale Carnegie’s book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1936) 13, 69. Compare Rick Warren’s admonition to form a group to review his material once a week to Dale Carnegie’s (another secular self-help author) similar admonition.

Rick Warren:

I strongly urge you to gather a small group of friends and form a Purpose-Driven Life Reading Group to review these chapters on a weekly basis” (*The Purpose-Driven Life*, 307).

Dale Carnegie:

When the classes [that teach *How to Win Friends and Influence People*] terminate, the men form clubs of their own and continue to meet fortnightly for years afterwards. One group of

nineteen men in Philadelphia have been meeting twice a month during the winter season for seventeen years. Men frequently motor fifty or a hundred miles to attend these classes. One student used to commute each week from Chicago to New York” (*How to Win Friends and Influence People*, 13).

31 *The Purpose-Driven Life*, 63.

32 Ibid., 17.

33 Ibid., 65.

34 Ibid., 66.

35 Ibid., 67.

36 Ibid., 117.

37 Ibid., 118.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., 171.

40 Ibid., 174.

41 Ibid., 174-176.

42 Ibid., 174.

43 Ibid., 227.

44 Ibid., 231.

45 Ibid., 281.

46 Ibid., 282-285.

47 Ibid., 286.

48 Ibid., 17.

49 Ibid., 22.

- 50 Ibid., 27.
- 51 Ibid., 36.
- 52 Ibid., 41.
- 53 Ibid., 47.
- 54 Ibid., 53.
- 55 Ibid., 63.
- 56 Ibid., 69.
- 57 Ibid., 77.
- 58 Nathan Busenitz, "A Sense of Purpose: Evaluating the Claims of the Purpose-Driven Life" in *Fool's Gold?: Discerning Truth in an Age of Error*, ed. by John MacArthur (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2005) 47. I am borrowing the phrase "key Christian themes" from Busenitz.
- 59 Warren's attempt to connect baptism with fellowship is a misunderstanding of this verse. First Corinthians 12:12-13 connects baptism with fellowship but that is not Jesus' intention here in Matthew 28:19. This verse connects baptism with evangelism and discipleship, not with fellowship.
- 60 *The Purpose-Driven Life*, 306.
- 61 Ibid., 181.
- 62 Although that is a little bit confusing when Warren writes,
- That's all you need to get started: *Decide* to become a disciple (Ibid., 180).
- Obedience unlocks God's power. God waits for you to act first. Don't wait to feel powerful
- or confident. Move ahead in your weakness, doing the right thing in spite of your fears and feelings. This is how you cooperate with the Holy Spirit, and it is how your character develops (Ibid., 175).
- The context in these quotations is not a discussion of salvation but of sanctification. But the comments are still confusing. It sounds as if the book is teaching that salvation is all a work of God's grace but that sanctification is first a work of man's effort and then God is allowed to tag along.
- 63 Ibid., 219, 221.
- 64 Ibid., 11.
- 65 Another example of Warren misinterpreting Scripture is his premise that "The Bible is clear that God considers 40 days a spiritually significant time period. Whenever God wanted to prepare someone for his purposes, he took 40 days" (Ibid., 9). This is the reason he creates "a 40-day spiritual journey" in the book. The problem with this is that there were many times in Scripture when God prepared someone for His purposes *without* using 40 days to do it. Abraham, Joseph, Samuel, Paul, Peter, and all of the apostles did amazing things for God without going through "a 40-day spiritual journey" to prepare them. Just because God used that period of time to prepare *some men* for His purposes does not mean that God uses that period of time for *all men*. To make such a claim is to misinterpret the Bible.
- 66 To be fair, 2 Corinthians 12:1-11 does say that the Holy Spirit gives believers spiritual gifts to minister to one another.
- And, in that sense, when believers come together to minister their gifts in church or in Bible Study, the Lord is with them. But that is not the teaching of Matthew 18:20.
- 67 To be clear, Romans 8:28 does say, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." God does work all things to the good of every Christian, but that is not the teaching of Jeremiah 29:11.
- 68 *The Purpose-Driven Life*, 238.
- 69 For more information on paraphrase translations or "Dynamic Equivalent" translations, see the FAQ, "Why are there so many translations of the Bible?"
- 70 James Sundquist, *Who's Driving the Purpose Driven Church?: A Documentary on the Teachings of Rick Warren* (Bethany, Okl.: Rock Salt Publishers, 2004) 32-49. Sundquist cites more than 20 different times when an inaccurate paraphrase translation is used in *The Purpose-Driven Life*.
- 71 *The Purpose-Driven Life*, 325.
- 72 After all, there were no Bible "verses" when Jesus and the apostles lived as Warren himself identifies, "Also, since the verse divisions and number were not included in the Bible until 1560 A.D., I haven't always quoted the *entire* verse, but rather focused on the phrase that was appropriate" (Ibid.).
- 73 *Fool's Gold*, 48-49.
- 74 *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. by Ronald F. Youngblood (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996)
516. For a thorough explanation of the Gospel, see Greg Gilbert's *What is the Gospel* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010).
- 75 *The Purpose-Driven Life*, 58-59.
- 76 This reviewer could find the word "sin" mentioned only a handful of times in *The Purpose-Driven Life*. Pages 54-55, 58, and 182 mention it briefly. But, other than these references, I could not find the word or the specific idea referred to.
- 77 Ibid., 58. Warren writes, "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." But he never explains what Jesus dying on the cross *means* or why it is necessary. And he never tells the reader why God needs to forgive him. He never mentions how the reader has offended a holy God.
- 78 *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997 ed.) 17.
- 79 This explains the immense popularity of the book. *The Purpose-Driven Life* emphasizes the parts of the Gospel that are easy to believe and it de-emphasizes the parts of the Gospel that are hard to believe. As Bob DeWay put it,
- Warren's explanation of God leaves out many important truths and emphasizes those qualities that make God feel close and safe. This does not result in a full, biblical understanding of God. You will never hear the warnings in the Bible about God's coming judgment. You will not learn about God's holiness from Warren. You

will not hear passages like this: “See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused Him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven” (Quoted in *Fool’s Gold*, 54).

80 This sounds harsh but it is no less than what Jesus said in John 6:26-27,

Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not work for good which perishes, but for good which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.

After Jesus fed the 5,000 (Jn 6:1-10), a group of Jewish men followed Jesus and His disciples across the Sea of Galilee into Capernaum, asking for some more bread (vv. 22-25). In response, Jesus tells them not to come to Him for bread but to come to Him for eternal life. In a similar way, Jesus would tell those who come to Him without considering their sin or God’s holiness or His atoning death to not come at all. They would do better to come to Him for the right reasons than to come to Him for a half-truth.

81 Gary Gilley, *This Little Church Went to Market: Is the Modern Church Reaching Out or Selling Out?* (Webster, N.Y.: Evangelical Press, 2005) 106.

82 *The Purpose-Driven Life*, 11.

83 Ibid., 186.

84 Ibid., 188.

85 Ibid., 192.

86 *Faith Misguided: Exposing the Dangers of Mysticism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988) 20.

87 Ps 19:1-6, Rom 1:18-20.

88 2 Tim 3:16-17 and 2 Pet 1:3 state that the Bible provides man with sufficient information to know how to live a Godly life. We do not need further revelation.

89 Rev 21:18-19 says that the Bible is the complete revelation from God. There is no more revelation to be added to it. For more information about the sufficiency and the completion of the Bible, see our FAQ, “What does the Bible say about itself?”

90 *The Purpose-Driven Life*, 238.

91 Ibid., 280.

92 Ibid., 275.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid., 233.

95 Ibid., 154.

96 Ibid., 140

97 Ibid., 272.

98 Ibid., 94.

99 Is 64:6; Js 2:10-11; 1 Jn 3:6.

10 *The Purpose-Driven Life*, 17.

101 Ibid., 9.

102 Ibid., 75.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid., 79.

105 Ibid., 290.

106 Ibid., 17.

107 Ibid., 22.

108 Ibid., 27.

109 Ibid., 32.

110 Ibid., 33.

111 Ibid., 37, 39, 50, 55, 80, 98, 131.

112 Ibid., 40.

113 Ibid., 79.

114 Ibid., 107.

115 Ibid., 163.

116 Ibid., 192.

117 Ibid., 193.

118 Ibid., 201.

119 Ibid., 231.

120 Ibid., 248.

121 Ibid., 242.

122 Ibid., 244.

123 Ibid., 64.

124 Ibid., 11.

125 On pages 19-20, he does cite Hugh S. Moorehead’s book, *The Meaning of Life: According to Our Century’s Greatest Writers and Thinkers*. On page 24, he also cites Michael Denton’s *Nature’s Destiny: How the Laws of Biology Reveal Purpose in the Universe*. But, other than these books and a handful of other ones, Warren does not mention where he gets his information.

126 *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. by J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978) 445. Madame Guyon was a French mystic who believed that she was fully united with God in a special way. She said that her “self-me” had exchanged places with her “God-me” and that it was one of her goals to plant an “interior church” and give birth to “spiritual children.”

127 Ibid., 959. Mother Teresa was a Roman Catholic nun who established hospitals to aid the poor in India. As a Roman Catholic, Teresa believed that Mary was the co-mediator with Christ, that saints should be prayed to, that the Mass was an event where Jesus was re-crucified every week, and that salvation must be earned, not accepted as a free gift of grace. Teresa was also a universalist who believed that good people from every faith will end up in Heaven.

128 *The Purpose-Driven Life*, 9.

129 Ibid., 10.

130 Luke 22:44 shows how stressed out Jesus was as He contemplated His upcoming death, “And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and his sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.”

131 *The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-Lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008) 14.