

SERMON 3
The Meaning of Life: A Gift From God
Third Sunday: Life Is a Gift To Be Used to God's Glory
"Why am I still here? Why won't God just let me go home?"

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 10:31

Sermon Theme & Parts:

- Understand Your Purpose – the Glory of God
 - I. Let It Shine in Your View of Death
 - II. Let It Shine in Your Use of Life

Define *happiness*. Define *love*. Have you ever tried to do that? When I studied this text, I put a friend on the spot with one of those types of questions. Out of the blue, I asked him to define "the glory of God." He said, "Oh...well..." and then he gave a few answers, good answers, but then finally settled on that perfect Sunday School answer: "Jesus." He too knew what the Sunday School kids instinctively pick up on: it's hard to be wrong with an answer like that. "Jesus." It is a good answer. Jesus is how we understand the glory of God. Jesus is why we give glory to God. Jesus is the way we see the glory of God, and the highlight of the glory of God. But maybe this concept needs a little more explanation, because today in our text, Paul tells us that this glory of God is really our purpose in life. That's why we are here – to bring glory to God. Our text says: **"Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."** In 1 Peter 2, Peter tells us that we are a people belonging to God so that we may declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light. That's why we are here – to give glory to God. So let's reflect on what that glory of God is.

Think of all the times in Scripture the glory of God is mentioned: from the burning of the bush that was talking to Moses to the pillar of fire that led the Israelites through the wilderness; from the firestorm on top of Mt. Sinai to the light, life and power source for heaven as John describes in Revelation. No sun is needed there, because there is the glory of God.

So what is the glory of God? It is really the shining of his massiveness, his other-than-anything-we're-familiar-with-ness, his being so far above and beyond us with our limited human capabilities that we can't even comprehend or understand the fullness of His glory. It is His greatness that holds the stars in His hand and spreads them out for us as Psalm 19 describes, His majesty and power revealed in inexpressible light and glimpsed in the burning bush and pillar of fire and all those other places. The glory of God is His inexpressible love that caused God to become one of us in order to let us see His glory (Romans 5:2) which we sinners could never have survived a glimpse of without Jesus.

So Jesus came to show us the glory of God in a way we could grasp – within our human limitations. Paul says, **"Now we see but a poor reflection, as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face"** (1 Corinthians 13:12). The glory of God is the opinion and impression of God that fits with how unlimited and extreme He is. When we do things to

His glory, we improve people's impression of God and show a piece of His – and not our own – magnificence. God is so great and so good that words don't fit.

With that in mind, realize what Paul says. The ultimate goal is to build up in others how great our God is, greater than those human minds could ever understand. How's that for a purpose in life?! Well, as hard as the "glory of God" is to understand, it is your purpose in how you live life and in how you view death. Think about that. First of all, think about how you can let the glory of God shine in how you view death.

Have you ever thought about how you want to die? Do you want it to be over quickly, or do you want a little time to know it's coming and prepare? Do you want to be rather young or old? Maybe you've felt Paul's conundrum he mentions in Philippians 1: **I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.** Are you ready to die? Are you ready to give God glory in how you face it?

The simple fact is, as much as we might think about how or when we will go, we don't really get a choice. That's part of the *glory of God* thing. God decides when and how, because he's God, remember, so much bigger than our minds could ever comprehend. And to live up to our purpose and give Him glory means we are OK with that.

That means taking to heart what we've been talking about during this "Meaning of Life" series. Two weeks ago we talked about defending the gift of life from those that want to end it because they say that the apparent quality of that life is gone. In Bible study we mentioned Terri Schiavo, the woman who died by starvation in Florida because some around her felt she wasn't getting everything she would have wanted out of life. Last week, we talked about respecting the fact that, when God says it is time for one of His children to come home, it's time. And that is OK. God doesn't command us to use all the machinery to keep our lungs moving and our blood flowing when it's clear that God is taking us or our loved one.

Now today, the two issues come together. The simple truth is, we don't know when our last day on earth will come. We don't know God's plan for the end of our loved ones' lives either – at least we don't know the timetable. We know some parts of His plan, like loving and caring for us, protecting us and guarding us. And we know that He deserves glory. So let the glory of God shine in how you view death.

(Insert a personal experience similar to this: I think of an email I received a short time ago from a young lady who expressed an experience I think most of us have gone through at one time or another. She told me it was so amazing to watch her prayers change from "Make Grandma better" to "Please, God, take her to heaven in peace." That is giving glory to God in how we view death.)

Or the lesson learned from Mildred, an elderly woman who never said a word in the four years she lived in the nursing home – apparently all the while on the brink of death. And then, her body started to reject the food fed to her through the feeding tube, which caused

all sorts of problems and ultimately resulted in its discontinuation. The family figured it was only a matter of time. In the 11+ weeks that she continued living without food – because all options for feeding her weren't working – she earned a nickname in that nursing home. The workers started calling her “the angel.” They knew, from the pictures she placed on her wall, from talking with her daughter, from hearing the devotions given with her – they knew her help came from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. And long after any medical personnel would have said she'd be gone, God used her to give an opportunity to describe God's law and sweet gospel to the lady who cleaned her room. It might have been easy to think that she was suffering far too long. But when that cleaning lady heard about God's love for her in Jesus, God was given glory through Mildred's life.

Is that how we always view the end of life for a loved one or for ourselves? Sadly, no. It is all too easy to get caught in the trap of self-pity. “Why am I here?” “Why shouldn't I get to go quickly?” or “Why couldn't I have had just one more year of health?” “It just isn't fair.” That is not giving glory to God. In fact, it's acting as though everything is about me instead of about Him.

Or maybe it is disguised as love for someone else: “Why do I have to watch my parent suffer?” “It isn't right for that child to have to think about death?” There again, we're missing the opportunity to give God glory. Maybe He wants to use this death like He used Mildred's. You know He's got something far better than we can even imagine or plan. But still, so often, we fail to give God glory. We run with everyone else who, as Paul says, “**have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**” So not only are we not giving Him glory, but we give up any right to ever see that glory or be a part of that glory.

And right there, when we should be plumbing the depths of despair, right there is when we see the highest peak of God's glory. You see, one of the chief reasons God gets glory is because of Jesus. Even when we were trying to take His glory, even when we were falling short of His glory, God revealed His love. “This is how,” John writes, “**this is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us**”. Our God is so good that He could love us when we didn't love Him. “**While we were still sinners,**” Scripture says, “**Christ died for us.**” We can't even comprehend that kind of love, but God has it. In fact, God *is* it. He is so great that He removed the guilt of all the times we tried to take His glory. He is so perfect that He overcame all the times we refused to give him glory. And by changing our hearts and minds, by overcoming even death for us when Jesus rose from the dead – He gets the glory.

So let's let it shine in how we view death, but then let's also let it shine in how we use our life. And that is important whether you or your loved one is facing death. Start by imagining yourself on the hospital bed with a week to live. How on earth could you give God glory there?

Think about the victim in the parable of the Good Samaritan – left for dead at the side of the road – with no money, no hope, and no worth. If we're gauging value by “quality of life,” this man was at the bottom of that list. But, his life gave glory to God, didn't it? It

gave that Samaritan believer the opportunity to show his love, to exercise his faith, to give God glory by helping.

Remember how Jesus said, “Come to me you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”? Maybe your purpose on that hospital bed is to let someone else live Jesus’ love for you. In our second lesson this morning, Paul reminds us that God gets the glory. When we go through our problems, we need to ask for help from the Lord. These experiences equip us to help others down the road and give glory to God by demonstrating His love in someone else’s life. The ultimate result is that our burdens serve as opportunities to glorify God.

Your life is all about the glory of God. And God gets the glory when His people realize that. I know I’ve been told several times as someone is approaching death, “I want you to make sure that this relative or this friend hears about Jesus at the funeral, because this might be the only way we can get him to church, and maybe he’ll listen now.” That is understanding how even death gives God glory. I know I’ve told several people to make sure that my funeral is an outreach event. When I go, invite everyone on our mailing list and then make sure the funeral is about God’s love in Jesus and not about me – because, that’s what our lives are about – the glory of God.

So with what time you’ve got left, whether a lot or a little, understand your purpose – that God gets the glory – and recognize every end-of-life decision and attitude and action in that light. So, as Paul says, “**Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do,**” whether you live or die or whatever you do, whether you recover or suffer or whatever you do, whether you go suddenly or slowly or whatever you do, whether you read a devotion to your loved one or sing them a hymn or sit quietly by their side holding their hand, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

That is your purpose in life. May God grant that we fulfill it. In Christ, Amen.