

WHY AM I HERE? Finding your passion in 2016

Text: Psalm 63:1-5

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It's a New Year and as we go forward into 2016 I want to give thought to the most basic question everyone faces in life: 'Why am I here?' 'What's the point to my existence?' It's the question asked by the bright young Christian woman who wonders, what should I study, what's my purpose in life, what is God's will for me? It's the question asked by the successful businessman, who has it all but he still feels empty inside. He yearns for something else, but doesn't know what. Rick Warren's book 'The Purpose Driven Life', now relabelled 'What on earth am I here for', has sold millions of copies. We can understand why.

Too often when we ask 'Why am I here?' we look in the wrong places for an answer. Usually we start with ourselves. We think of what we enjoy. We think of a career, of finding a life partner. We have our ambitions and dreams. But all that is starting in the wrong place. Life is not about you. Now that's a surprising thing to say when we are often told 'the most important person in the world is you'. 'Get out there and have a good time. You deserve to be happy'. Well, I hope you have a good life. But if you want to find its purpose, you have to realise it's not about you. It's about God. If you want to know about the how and why of you on this planet you must begin with God.

Now sometimes 'God talk' switches people off. They want something exciting not our talk of God. Listen to something C.S Lewis wrote: 'Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered to us... [We are] like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are too easily pleased.' Do you understand what he is saying? He says in effect: 'You want to settle on sex, drugs and rock and roll? You wimp, get a life! You want to settle on a career, fame, fortune, wine and song? Good grief, why stay with the boring stuff? Your problem is your desires are too weak. Your goals are too small. There's not enough passion. Get with it and be fulfilled with the greatest in life: God himself!' Now many of us will say 'But we worship God'. OK, but do you worship and adore God just for who he is? Or do you appreciate God because he gives you the enjoyable things of life? Would you still worship God if he didn't provide the good things in life?

To really understand your purpose in life, you must come to see that God himself is your greatest desire and the greatest pleasure in your life. Gerald May in his book 'Addiction & Grace' writes 'After twenty years of listening to the yearnings of people's hearts, I am convinced that all human beings have an inborn desire for God. Whether we are consciously religious or not this desire is our deepest longing and our most precious treasure. It gives us meaning. Some of us have repressed this desire, burying it beneath so many other interests that we are completely unaware of it. Or we may experience it in different ways- as a longing for wholeness, completion, or fulfilment. Regardless of how

we describe it, it is a longing for love. It is a hunger to love, to be loved and to move closer to the source of love. This yearning is the essence of the human spirit; it is the origin of our highest hopes and most noble dreams'. The Westminster Catechism picks up on this point with its first question, "*What is the chief purpose of man?* In other words why are we here? And the answer says "*To glorify God and enjoy him forever.*" John Piper in his book 'Desiring God' puts it slightly different: "*To glorify God by enjoying him forever?*" Where does this all come from? It comes mainly from the psalms. Enjoying God is at the heart of the psalms. Listen to Psalm 16:11 "*You have made known to me the path of life; you fill me with joy in your presence; with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*"

Turn with me to Psalm 63 where we see David's deep desire for God. The setting is that David is stuck out in the harsh desert. David is King of Israel and is now old. He has fled Jerusalem because Absalom his son is out to kill him to take over the country. So there David is in that desolate Judean desert with little provision. He is hungry and terribly thirsty. What does he pray for? Look at verse 1: "*O God, you are my God,/ earnestly I seek you,/ my soul thirsts for you,/ my body yearns for you,/ in a dry and weary land/ where there is no water.*" You notice that David, as thirsty as he may be, has a far deeper longing for something other than water, namely God himself. What David does is to use a physical reality, his terrible thirst, to illustrate his spiritual condition. Do you know that up to 60% of your body is water. The brain is 70% water, blood is 82% water, and the lungs are 90% water. So even though we can survive about 40 days without food, we can go only a fraction of that time without water. We constantly need lots of water or our body system fails and we die. That desperate longing and need David has for water, "*...in a dry and weary land where there is no water...*", his soul has for God, "*...my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you...*" You notice how he says that not just his soul, but his "*body longs*" for God. Does that sound strange to you, that you can long for God with every fibre of your being? Maybe it sounds strange but I think you have sensed it. You know how it feels if you haven't eaten for a while, you feel faint, disorientated, short tempered? You desperately need to eat. If good food isn't handy you will eat whatever you can get your hands on. I put it to you that many have a yearning inside for God. But they don't know what it is and instead throw themselves into unhelpful relationships, or work, buying sprees, an adrenaline fix, something, anything, all kinds of addictions to fill the void inside.

David cries out "*O God, ... my God...*" "*O God...*" is a cry for someone beyond us to help us. We hear a lot of people say "*O God...*" these days, especially if they are surprised or scared. They often don't realise what they are saying but it's actually a cry for help. That's usually where our search for meaning begins. Our spiritual journey towards God begins when we recognise that life isn't always that good. And so we look up and long for something. We hope, we sense, that there is a God. "*O God...*" first, then "*...my God...*" Now, there is a vast space between realising, hoping, there is a God and knowing that God is "*my God*". The vast difference between those two phrases is bridged by Jesus. Through the Christmas event, God stooped and became one of us. Through his death and resurrection Jesus bridged the huge gap between us and God. He made the way for us to be reconciled with God. And with his life giving Spirit we are made spiritually alive. We are able to respond to God. We are able to say of the awesome creator "*Avva- Father*". The second phrase "*my God*" is radically profound and daring. It does not come from us. It comes from God himself. He allows us to say it. In fact he longs for us to say it. David's longing here is not the groping of a stranger feeling his way towards God. It's the eagerness of a deep friend. We could say almost of a lover to be in touch with the one he loves the most.

Now to say “*my God*” does not mean God is our personal God. He is not like a genie in a bottle, ready to take out when we need help. God is never ‘ours’ in the sense we own or control him. If we owned God we would not need to “*seek*” him. Listen again to David “*O God, my God earnestly I seek you...*” Why seek God? Why search for God? Haven’t we just said that God has come to us in Jesus? When we have faith in Jesus we are God’s forgiven children. So what do we seek? His guidance for our lives? Yes. His forgiveness? Yes. His blessings? Yes. His will for our lives? Yes. But, now, listen to David. See where he takes us. “*Earnestly I seek YOU...*” he says with nothing further added. It is God himself David seeks. Not something from God, but God’s self. He does not want to tell God something. He simply wants to be in the Divine Presence, just to be with God. “*I seek YOU*”. This is the language of love. I just want to be with you! Bernard of Clairvaux wrote ‘To love God without demand or without measure, in and for himself, this is love’. It is in fact the love God wants of us. As Moses put it “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*”. That is what it is to glorify God. That is how we glorify God by enjoying him. To earnestly seek God means we make every effort to be with him. It comes through worship, Bible reading and prayer, meditation, telling God how much we adore him and love him, talking with God about ourselves, listening to God speaking to us. God is a person, so are we. People get to know each other only when they spend time with each other and open up to each other. People get to love each other when they listen in love to what is in the other’s heart. God invites us to do the same with him. Through the prophet Jeremiah God said “*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart*”. (Jeremiah 29:13) Jesus also promised (Mathew 7:7) “*Seek and you will find*”. Come in repentance and faith in Jesus and you will find God. Then you will also find the whole point to life.

In fact, God is better than life. Listen again to David in verse 3 “*Your love is better than life*.” What David means here is that he wanted God more than he wanted life. And if you want God more than you want life, then you want God more than all the joys of this life. Things like family, health, food, friends, sexual intimacy, a job, books, computers, music. David is not denying that all these good things come from God. They are expressions of his love for us. But he is warning us that if we settle on these good things, even gratefully, we settle for the gift not the giver. As C.S Lewis would say our desires are too weak. We settle for mud pies in a slum when we can build beautiful sand castles on the beach. I put it to you that sometimes that is why God has to put us through the rough times. People often ask ‘If God loves us why do we suffer?’ It’s often when we go through a rough time we wonder about the purpose of life. When that happens it’s often because God is doing us a favour. He is weaning us off our addictions of all the good things we have and learn again to love him, not just what he gives. It is not by coincidence that when David writes this psalm he is in the desert being pursued by Absalom who wants to kill him. “*Your love is better than life*”. The Christian martyrs knew that. As they died for the faith, they didn’t think they were losing out. As one put it ‘It is no loss to give up one thing by which I gain something far greater.’ Our purpose in life is to glorify God and often, as with the martyrs, that happens best when we go through the hard stuff and still hang on to God. Any one can say ‘Thanks God’ when it’s all smooth sailing. But to express love and devotion to God when life has hit you for a six, that says deep things to the people around you.

David says in verse 5 “*My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods*.” It is interesting, the Hebrew original reads “*with fat and fatness will I be satisfied*.” You see in the Old Testament temple worship the choicest meat was offered to God, with all the fat

left on it. For those folk that was the best of the best when it came to food. So when we earnestly look for God above everything else, we are not in the least missing out. In fact we have the best of the best. Picking up on the earthy Hebrew way of describing it we can say we are 'pigging out and hoeing into a feast.' The wonder of it all is also seen in the way David just wants to sing it out: (3&4) "*Because your love is better than life my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live and in your name I will lift up my hands.*" Again of interest here is the Hebrew "*singing lips or lips of joy*" which means to "give a ringing cry". David, as an old Hebrew was not reserved like us in worship. He would sing and dance and shout out "Yahoooo for God!"

No wonder David was so exuberant. He had found the greatest thrill in life. His longing heart had come into the presence of God, and with God had found the most wonderful, awesome, magnificent person of all. He found home. He found his reason for life. As we step into 2016 may we strive to "*glorify God by enjoying him ...*". It will give purpose to everything we do in the New Year. And put passion into our spirituality.