

WHY AM I HERE?

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Why Am I Here? Understanding Work

This was the question that drove my life till I found Jesus Christ. At first sight, life seemed to have no meaning or purpose. It seemed to be a crazy roller coaster ride that ended with death. Then why try to do anything other than enjoying oneself to the hilt.

With a wild lifestyle, I did not find the peace or joy one would expect and so I began reading philosophy at the age of 16. I was introduced to Philosophy by Will Durant's book *The Story of Philosophy*. I read a lot of philosophers, beginning with the Greeks and going on to the Romans and those of the later periods but was left unsatisfied. Finally reading Augustine's *Confessions* and *City of God* I found the answer. God was the meaning in life. Everything began with Him and ended with Him.

While God was the meaning, how did it apply to my life? Does not the work of ministry become the only reason for existence as Paul says in Phil 1:20, "*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain?*" I lost interest in my work and began to wait for work to be over to get involved with 'Christian activity'.

I asked my Pastor to recommend a good Bible school so that I could become an evangelist. He dissuaded me and told me to remain where God had brought me. As Paul says in 1 Cor 7:20f, "*Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it.*"

That led to a two year search which gave me some insights and laid a foundation for my life. Reading Peter Drucker, he mentioned Malthus who was a pastor and sociologist who lived at the end of 18th century, who said that since the population of the world doubles every 40 years or so, while the land under cultivation remains fixed, the world would become poorer and people will starve. While the population doubled every 40 years or so, the world got richer and food became surplus. How come? Because of science and technology. Because of science and technology, the productivity of land multiplied. But the Bible says that God is the one who feeds the world. Ps 136:25, "*He gives food to every creature. His love endures forever.*"

This gave a new insight, that God not only wants evangelist, but He also wants us to fulfil His larger purpose for providing for the world. God not only gives us spiritual salvation, but He also provides for the needs of mankind through the different businesses that exist and the work we do. I am not just doing a job. I am fulfilling a role for which God has called me.

My whole approach to work changed. Now work was exciting, as our goal changed from self-advancement to serving mankind. This transformation of my approach to work led to what I was seeking, an exciting work life, and also to what I was not seeking rapid progress up the ladder into senior leadership positions.

Why Am I Here? A Stewardship Perspective

This stewardship perspective of life, begins right in the first chapter of the Bible, in Gen 1:28, where mankind is given dominion over creation, *“Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”* This verse needs to be read along with Genesis 2:15 which reads as, *“Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.”* Adam is told to tend the garden on behalf of God.

Ps 24:1 says that everything that is there in creation belongs to God,
“The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.”

We are not owners of anything, but stewards. All the wealth we have, the skills we have, everything belongs to God and as the parable of the talents in Matt 25 brings out, we are to use them for the purposes of God – to care for the needs of mankind. So all that I do in life needs to be linked with serving mankind and their needs. Through this we serve God and fulfil His purposes for us.

This world view is essential to be able to understand why I am here.

Ps 139:13-16

*For You formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother’s womb.
I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Marvelous are Your works,
And that my soul knows very well.
My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When as yet there were none of them.*

brings out the fact that I have been uniquely crafted by God for a specific purpose which He has ordained for me. The same is reiterated in Eph 2:10, *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”*. Hence God has brought me to where I am, according to His divine purpose. I do not need to fight the situation where I find myself in but need to try and understand why God would bring me here and what He would have me to do. So the first step in understanding why I am here is to accept my present context as God arranged, and to see how I can fulfil God’s purposes where I am.

Since God has pre-ordained the good work I am to do, do I have to know this plan? How can I fulfil it if I do not know the plan? No, we do not need to know the plan or what God expects. We walk by faith that God is in control. As we live by the principles taught to us by

the Bible, in the context God has provided for me, the purposes of God are fulfilled in my life.

Many people think responding to God's call means changing our present situation. It is not. It is changing our behaviour in the situation we are in. Before we were living with worldly values but now we live with the values of Jesus. Earlier we were living for worldly purposes, but now we live for the purposes of Jesus. That is the primary change that Jesus wants in our lives.

Why Am I Here? The Divine Perspective of life

Before we came to Jesus the objective of all that we did was either pleasure or the acquisition of worldly goods or status. Jesus said, 'Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand'. Jesus was calling us to repent from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of God. Many misunderstand this call to repentance. If we read right through the New Testament, Jesus and His disciples, ask people to 'repent', not to 'repent from their sins'. John the Baptist asked people to repent from their sins, but Jesus called for a deeper repentance.

Temptations leading to sin comes from our desire for the things of this world. James 1:13-15 says,

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

and 1 Tim 6:9-10,

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Repenting (turning away) from sin does not help unless I also repent (turn away) from the source of sin. Once I turn away from the source of sin, repentance from sin becomes easier and a reality. Otherwise we are just struggling with sin all through our life, instead of fulfilling God's purposes for our lives. Our goal changes from 'serving God' to 'not sinning'. That is not right. Our goal is serving God.

Once we turn away from this, we begin to seek the purposes of God rather than our worldly desires. Work is not focused on getting the next promotion but of serving the needs of my team members and clients. My job is not just a means of income but of fulfilling the larger purposes of God. So, I research and study a lot more to understand why God would want that job and what does it contribute to the good of mankind. My job becomes more meaningful and I get a passion for my job which I would not have had otherwise.

Since I am no longer competing with my colleagues for promotions and other benefits, I get along better with them and am able to build a team more effectively in the work place. This puts my life in the proper perspective.

The same applies to the home. It is not about me, but about what God is doing in my home. Are we preparing the children for the work of God or making them self-centred people who are running after the world? Is our family inward focused or outwardly focused to be a blessing to other families?

Paul summarizes this world view in 2 Cor 5:15 as, *"and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again."*

Why Am I Here? Following Jesus

Jesus said follow Me and I will make you fisher's of men. This is a clear command, 'Follow Me'. I am here to follow Jesus. But what does it mean to follow Jesus? For the apostles it meant leaving behind whatever they were doing for the work which Jesus had called them to. While we may not physically leave what we are doing, but our motives for what we are doing changes, and we live in this new approach to life.

The first step Jesus took in His life before His ministry was to be baptized. While Jesus took John's baptism, we take the baptism of Jesus. According to Acts 19:1-5 the two are different.

The baptism of Jesus was a baptism of the Spirit. Jesus said that being baptized with the Spirit was more important than water baptism, which is true. But what was the baptism that the church administered? It was a baptism of repentance from the world and a turning to the kingdom of God. In water baptism we make a commitment which is the first step in our journey with Jesus. That is spelt out in Romans 6:1-6, as

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

Jesus made a similar statement in Matt 16:24f, as

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Do not make the common mistake of seeing the cross as symbolizing suffering. It does not. It symbolizes death. We are not called to suffer but to die to the world.

This is brought out well in the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5. It says in vs 11, Peter, James and John forsook all and followed Jesus. They did not hang on to the fishes, but left them for others.

The next step in following Jesus, after having made this commitment is to stay with Him. It is when we stay with Him and abide in His words, that we get to know Jesus. Jesus said, where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there. So spending time with Jesus is both done individually and as a community, with the church. I need to commit to a community of believers where I grow in the Lord.

Jesus emphasized this in John 13:34-35,

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

This is our testimony to the world outside, that we are followers of Jesus, when the community of believers is a real brotherhood where we care for each other.

It is this renunciation of the things of the world, and a turning to Jesus and His kingdom that give us a right perspective of worldly things. No more are they things we run after, but rather they are instruments for God's purpose and to be used for the purpose of God as the parable of the talents brought out.

Why Am I Here?

Study of the word

Paul calls the word of God the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17). When I know that I am here purely to serve God, it is important for me to study and know the Bible.

Many tend to see the Bible as statements made by God similar to the Muslims understanding of the Koran. But that would be an error. The Bible is a message from God, given to men who wrote it down in their own words and understanding. The message needs to be understood. The sentences that form the message cannot be taken as absolute statements apart from the message it conveys. So the habit of proof texting (using a verse to justify your point of view) is usually wrong, unless the sentence is being seen in the context in which it was written,

So to understand the Bible I need to first understand the context and the message the author is intending to communicate. The message gives me a world view rather than a series of commands to be obeyed. As Paul says, in Romans 12:1-2, “ *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*” If I am to understand God’s purpose for me, I need to change my world view from the human, worldly world view to the divine world view given in the Bible.

To develop this kind of an understanding from the Bible, I need to understand its message and then live by its message. It is the living by the message which gives me a comprehensive understanding of the Biblical world view. If I just understand the message, but do not live by it, it just becomes a theoretical construct in my mind, one of many ‘maybes’. It is when I live by it does it become a reality which takes control of my life.

If I want to understand why I am here, this is a must. Let me give an example of what I am saying.

In John 13, Jesus washed the feet of the apostles and said that we need to do the same, John 13:15. If taken as a literal command we need to be literally washing each other’s feet every Sunday. Understood as a message, it means we need to be helping build each other up every Sunday by meeting people’s physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual needs whenever we meet.

If I do not practice this in my life, it remains as a construct in my mind but not in my life, and my world view does not change nor do I come to a place where I can understand what God is doing or wanting me to do. This is amply illustrated in the narrative in John 6:60-66. In John 6:60 some of the disciples complained that what Jesus was teaching as hard and difficult to comprehend. In John 6:66 it says that from that time many of the disciples stopped following Jesus. So knowing the message is inadequate. It is doing the message that brings the understanding.

Often people want to know God’s call for their lives but do not want to do what God has told them to do. Primarily to follow Him. That is the first step. To do this first step, I need to know the Bible, its message and to implement the message in my life.

Why Am I Here? You are Commissioned

Many are waiting for God's call to come to them. They anticipate a Damascus road experience. There is absolutely no need to wait for anything. We are already commissioned! Jesus said in John 17:18 "Even as the Father has sent me I send you. That means, as I study the life of Jesus, I understand that I am expected to live in the same manner in the place where God has placed me in.

Many think a calling is something to do. It is not. It is a life to be led. As Paul says in Phil 1:20-21 his life was the calling of Jesus. In that sense our calling is clear, to live the sermon on the Mount where we are. As we fulfil this role, a higher calling may come.

What does the Bible say about why Jesus came to earth?

- Hebrews 1:1-2a – God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son,
- 1 John 3:8 – For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.
- John 10:10 – I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.
- Matthew 20:28 – the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

These are some verses I have extracted. There are many more. But these give us some idea of what God wants is to be doing with our lives.

Heb 1:1-2a We are meant to reveal the mind of God to people. To be able to do this, I need to know the Bible well. That means I am not studying the Bible for my own benefit, but so that I can share about God to others. This is what God has sent me for.

But I have found that people can only understand my message when they see it in my life. If I tell someone God loves you like a Father, it makes no sense to him since he or she has not experienced love in their lives. It is only if I live what I teach and they experience love from me can they understand what I am saying. So, not only must I teach God's word to people but also live God's word to people so that they can understand it.

1 John 3:8 Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. In the world we live in these are the corruption and oppression that you see in the world around us. As citizens of the kingdom of God we take a stand against any corruption or oppression we see and ensure that we do not get involved in the same. Being involved in fighting the corruption and evil we see around us is one of our major calling as a part of our life style. This calling as members of the kingdom of God does not require a specific call.

In John 10:10 it says that Jesus came to give people abundant life. People around us are trapped in situations and cannot find their way out of it. As members of the kingdom of God we get involved with the lives of the people around us and help them out of their problems. For these kind of acts again no special calling is needed. We are commissioned to go out and help people in their lives, in the place where we work and live.

According to Matthew 20:28 Jesus came not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. We are not here to be served by people but to serve people. To do this, we need to make sacrifices, as we give up our position and rights for the needs of others. In the places where we expect to be served we try and see how we can serve. Paul writes in Col 1:24 that he wants to complete in his body what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. This means he wants to complete the suffering involved in taking the message of the cross to the people. We do this by living in the example Jesus gave us.

When we live like this our life becomes a ministry to people, and that is what Jesus wants to see. This is what it means to follow Jesus. To follow His example and not to just confess faith in Jesus.

When there is so much for us to do where we are, I am puzzled why people are looking for a call. Our life is our call and we do not need anything else.

Since most people do not follow Jesus, or stop following Jesus when they bump into a difficult saying, they never understand the purposes of God for them in their lives.

Why Am I Here?

Washing the feet of the believers

The kingdom of God is not just where God rules, but it is also the community of His people. We are here to serve this community. Jesus spells this out in John 13, where Jesus washes the feet of the apostles and then says this is an example for us to follow (John 13:15). Later he adds the command to love the fellow believers John 13:34-35, *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*". The practice of this is seen in Acts 4:34.

After following Jesus the next step is to get integrated into this community and serve this community as an expression of our love for them. In effect our call from God becomes to do what the community asks of you. This is spelt out in detail by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 14 in using our gifts to build the community of God. The gifts are not our call and not for our glory but to be used to fulfil our call of serving the community of God.

Paul served the church for 13 years before the church sent him as a missionary. Though God had called him on the Damascus road, he waited for the church to send him. He submitted to the authority of the church.

If we see Acts 6, there was a problem in the church over the administration of food to orphans and widows. Stephen was a miracle worker Acts 6:8. He was a powerful Bible teacher. Yet when the church asked him to look after the administration of food to the weakest section in the church he willingly took it up.

If we read Acts 6:2 we see the apostles saying that it is not right for them to do the work and Stephen is selected. Stephen could have protested, but he knew the call of every Christian is to serve the church and he did so.

Many complain to me that the church does not use their talents and gifts. This is a misconception that one's call is linked to their gifts. It is not. We are called to serve the church, not use our gifts. (By the way the talent in the parable of the talent was money and not abilities). We use our gifts to serve the church. But the service we render is where they have a need. You may ask, but what if I do not have the gift for that work? I would say you are in good company. Moses complained that he was not gifted for what he was called to do. Jeremiah complain bitterly about his call. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus Himself was not happy with His call.

Use your gifts within the responsibility given to you and continue to do what you do. I can see Stephen praying away the minor illnesses of the widows and answering the question they have on their plight, while he continued to teach the Bible and heal people. That is what we are called to do.

As a policy, based on this, I never say No to what the church asks me to do, though I do insist on clarity of the purpose and the goals.

Why Am I Here? The Voice of God

This is controversial and different churches have different doctrines on this. Those who follow the cessation view do not believe that the voice of God is there now, whereas the others believe that the voice of God exists.

Based on my own experience in my life I go with the second view and do not accept the cessation view. However, I am aware of the utter chaos this view has created and the need to safeguard oneself from the chaos. However, I find certain ground rules help in walking through the quagmire.

As I have indicated in the earlier pages, that there is no need for the voice of God as He guides me through the circumstances He has placed me in. He essentially wants me to live by his principles and for His kingdom, and for that the voice of God is not needed. However, there are times when you need specific guidance, and at these times, when God is asking you to step out of the ordinary, His voice is needed.

Let me give certain cautions first. Do not be inquisitive and try to determine the future. We trust God and just follow Him as He leads us through circumstances and by controlling events around us. We do not try and seek to know the future as we trust the future with God and do not need to know it. The desire to know the future is essentially a lack of faith in God and His control over my life.

Do not let worldly desires dominate your life. Once we have desires in our heart, it becomes almost impossible here God speaking as our desires will make us hear only what we want to hear and not anything else. In such cases it usually our own spirit speaking to us which we think is God speaking. I have seen this happen so many times!! Young people say that God told them to marry someone, and they then move on after a few months. God told me I would get admission, but I did not!! And it goes on.

It is only when I am neutral, and not looking for anything specific that I can usually hear the voice of God.

Because of this uncertainty, when you feel God telling you something, do not act on it, unless it is something minor where an error may not matter. Like sometimes God asks me to witness to someone. I may do it even if I am not sure, since it usually would not matter. Otherwise, I wait for God to actually bring something about that confirms the word received. I may discuss it with an elder or a group of elders and go by what they say, but usually waiting for God to confirm it. I have found that this works excellently.

Amos 3:7 says that God does nothing without revealing it to His servants His prophets. The problem is not that God speaks, but that we are deaf to God and do not hear when He speaks. But it is also a fact that God wants us to live by faith, without knowing all the details of the future. So, when something important has to be told, He speaks, and we do not need to go hunting for the voice of God.

We tend to think of God speaking daily to the apostles. A careful reading of the Bible will show that is not necessarily true. In the Old Testament narrative which for Abraham begins in his 75th year or a little earlier and ends with his death at the age of 175, there are less than ten

interactions with God!! In the case of Paul, after Acts 9 and the Damascus road, we have Ananias prophesying to him, his time in Arabia of which no details are given, then his experience at Troas when God redirected him to Philippi, God speaking to him in the prison at Caesarea and God's speaking to him at the time of the shipwreck.

So, when we say God speaks to you, we are not speaking of a daily conversation, but of unusual experiences, where God intervenes. I will share my experiences, and you see that it will be different from yours. There are no rules.

Why Am I Here?

God speaks in many ways

God speaks in a variety of methods. Depending on your personality and the way God has designed you, He speaks to you. It is different for different people and so we cannot make a general rule for this.

The most common, which many have experienced, is while reading the Bible, one verse jumps at you as an answer to your situation. Often, the interpretation of the verse that comes to you is not the right one, however, the wrong interpretation answers your question or gives you a solution. While I do not encourage emotional interpretations but insist on contextual interpretations, I do recognize that often God uses unorthodox ways to communicate. As I have mentioned earlier, do not act on it without confirmation.

The next important way in which God speaks is through the sermons of individuals. When my pastor was speaking in Lucknow, I heard God telling me that I had not made the commitment the Pastor was asking for, and made the commitment which began my walk with God. Again I may have misunderstood what the preacher was saying, but God speaks to me even through the misunderstanding!!

The other way in which God speaks when a nagging thought comes into your mind from nowhere and you strongly feel that it is from God. For instance, while walking to the bus-stop to catch my bus to office, I heard God telling me (not an audible voice) to go back home. Those days there was no mobile phone and I wondered what I would tell my wife on reaching home. But I did go back and an individual that I had led to a commitment and who lived far away had come to meet with me, and so I could call my office and tell them I would not be in for the day and spend time with him.

These kind of happenings occur to me around once a year, or marginally more, usually in connection with ministry. Some are not momentous and so can be carried out, and if I had made a mistake nothing earth shaking would have happened. Some were more difficult, but they went well.

Another way is through dreams and even audible voices speaking to you. While I have never had an audible voice speak to me, I have had a dramatic dream which was exhilarating. I had a dream at the end of which God said, I am turning your life upside down. I shared this with my wife, and then put it out of my mind. In the evening I got a call asking if I would be willing to take an assignment in Singapore and knew that this is what God was indicating.

But what about the Damascus road experience? These are not like that. It is not a calling for life, but calling to do small tasks. True. I do not consider the Damascus road experience as a must for all Christians, as we are called to live the Christian life in the place where God has put us. But some will have the Damascus road experience. My Damascus road experience was less dramatic, equally clear.

I began to feel that God wanted me to move from the government job I was in to working in a ministry. I decided that it needed to be an act of faith, so that I leave the government before I complete 20 years and become eligible for a pension. So, when I made it known that I am available, and one ministry asked me to apply for their post. I did and they sat on the application for 18 months before saying they did not consider me fit for the job. Then another

organization which I was heavily involved with, asked me to join them. I said okay. After a year they said everything is through and all the approvals obtained, but do I feel God telling me to the join the organization. I said I am ready to join, but have no such leading from God. They said, let us then wait. The another organization asked me to join them. They took me to the USA to see what they are involved in. I found it a glitzy, five star hotel affair. So I said, I am not designed for such work or to be in such an environment. While traveling back, God told me to join the organization and for the next twenty years, till I resigned I worked with them. Interestingly, my 20 years with the government was completed by the time all this happened, and God arranged for me to have a pension!

Why Am I Here? Closing Thoughts

I trust that you will find this booklet helpful in sorting out your ideas about your Christian life. I feel it is essential to be clear about our purposes here in this world.

So knowing why I am here involves the following:-

1. Having an understanding of our role as Stewards
2. Repent from the world and begin to live for Jesus and His kingdom
3. Seek to serve the people in the place where you live and work
4. Serve the church of which you are a member, responding to any request they make
5. Study the Bible and live by its teachings, so that you develop the world view of Jesus
6. Respond to the voice of God in an appropriate manner