



**May 6, 2007**

Psalm 122:1-2, 6-7

Psalm 149:1-5

## “Planned for God’s Pleasure”

“What is the purpose of my life?” This is a question we begin to raise when we are still children. It becomes more forceful as we go through high school, and into the adult world. It comes back to us during times of transition: marriage, divorce, raising children, job changes, when we have those “O” birthdays (The big 3-0, 4-0, 5-0, and so forth).

The Christian faith has proposed an answer to that question for hundreds of years. It appears in catechism classes in various denominations (Roman Catholic and Lutheran for example). Here it is : The purpose of your life is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Now when I heard that as a kid, I thought, “Oh, joy.” (with sarcasm) But that was because I thought glorifying God meant sitting around in a church praying all the time. I have learned to LOVE this purpose for my life. Because—marathon runners can glorify God by running. Tour de France cyclists can glorify God by their biking. Telling a joke to a friend who's depressed can glorify God. There is no end to the ways we can glorify God.

Baptist preacher, Rick Warren, has written a book about glorifying God called **THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE**, which I understand was studied here a few years ago. Although I do not agree with everything in his book, he has a great deal of insight to offer us. One of the first ways we glorify God, he states, is by our worship.

Let’s consider the wisdom he shares on that subject.  
Why did God make you?

I stated that the classic Christian answer to OUR purpose for living is: To glorify God and enjoy him forever.  
But there's more to this.

God made you to ENJOY YOU. Why did God make you? To be tickled by you, touched by you, moved by you, to find immense pleasure in you.

That's not so different from the reason people decide to have children. They look forward to ENJOYING them—to feeling the softness of their newborn skin. To watch them sleeping like little angels. To teach them to run and ride bikes. To play ball with them. To hold them on a lap, to sing to them and comfort them.

Psalm 149 depicts people worshipping joyfully, savoring life- and clearly names this truth: *The Lord takes pleasure in his people.*

Warren states, *Bringing enjoyment to God, living for his pleasure, is the first purpose of your life.....Bringing pleasure to God is called 'worship'. Anything you do that brings pleasure to God is an act of worship.*

Worship is not just an event—a church service. Worship is not just singing or music. Worship is a LIFESTYLE of enjoying God, loving him, and bringing him pleasure. Worship is not just PART of your life; it IS your life.

Every activity of life is transformed into an act of worship when we do it for the pleasure of God. HOW can we do this? Do everything as if you were doing it for Jesus. This is the secret to a lifestyle of worship.

Warren suggests some key components of worship—ways we give God pleasure.

First, trust him. It helps me to think about Jesus as my brother in this aspect of life. I was really lucky to grow up with a brother who adored me and respected me. I KNEW he would never do anything to hurt me. And he never has. The stories in the Bible about Jesus help me to know that HE is my brother, too. And his ways, his wisdom are far beyond what any human family member or friend can offer me. He knows this world, and this life. He knows ME through and through. So I can trust that his will for me is always right, always good. I am gradually learning to EXPECT that he will help me with my struggles and keep his promises to love me and uphold me NO MATTER WHAT.

Big things require me to trust God. Watching a loved one being wheeled off to surgery requires a leap of faith and trust that NO MATTER WHAT God is present and will preserve us.

But little things require me to trust God, too. It was a big leap for me to return to church attendance as a young mom in my twenties. That doesn't seem like any huge step, but I felt a bit strange doing it—not sure what I would find—would I “fit” anywhere? Would it be awkward or even uncomfortable? God met me and surprised me—I found stimulation and comfort and many good things I didn't expect. (For one thing, I figured the preaching would be lame, and it wasn't!)

**Trust God.** It brings him joy and pleasure. **It is one way we worship.**

Second, obey God. It's the trust we have developed that allows us to obey God.

As a girl in grade school I loved Laura Ingalls Wilder's books- the “Little House on the Prairie” series. When my kids started school, I read them again, along with my children. It was fascinating. There were so many things in those books I never noticed as a kid. In one scene Pa is scolding Laura and Mary for disobeying him. He tried to explain, “You have to obey me IMMEDIATELY, even if you don't understand WHY I'm telling you to do something. Sometimes there is NO TIME for me to explain, and you could be hurt or even die if you hesitate.” The situation had to do with a rattlesnake or rabid wild animal or something like that.

We have trouble with that kind of obedience when we are children. And we have probably even MORE trouble with that kind of obedience when it comes to God. As Warren puts it, *Often we try to offer God PARTIAL obedience. We want to pick and choose the commands we obey. ...I'll attend church but I won't tithe. (give ten percent of my income). I'll read my Bible but I won't forgive the person who hurt me.*

We struggle to obey God. But it's not really hard to do. We just have to DECIDE. That's where our trouble is—not in obeying, but in DECIDING to obey.

**DECIDE to OBEY God.** It brings him joy and pleasure. **It is one way we worship.**

Next, God smiles when we praise and thank him continually. That may seem impossible at first glance. How could anyone thank God all the time? Even in a crisis? Even when suffering?

Well, we don't have to START there. Start by thinking about God when you are NOT hurting. Just in ordinary times. Ask yourself, *what is precious to me about this very moment?* Look around for a minute. Close your eyes and listen. Relax. Whenever we stop like this, and remember God is with us, we usually feel some

kind of gratitude. *It's so great to just lie down like this in the recliner, and hear the kids playing in the other room. I really love this music. I had a great time today at the gym, even though my muscles are feeling it—it's a GOOD kind of tired. Be glad for these things, and thank God for his gift of life.*

As we do this in ordinary times, we begin to learn how to do it in hard times. Even in a moment of tragedy, we may find a blessing where we didn't expect it—A nurse's hand on our own that conveys tender compassion; a friend's phone call that says, "I really care."

Let gratitude wash through every day. It brings God joy and pleasure. It is one way we worship.

Next, God smiles when we use our abilities. Rick Warren explains, *You may feel that the only time God is pleased with you is when you're doing 'spiritual' activities- like reading the Bible, attending church, praying or sharing your faith....You may think God is unconcerned about the other parts of your life... Every human activity can be done for God's pleasure if you do it with an attitude of praise. You can wash dishes, repair a machine, sell a product, write a computer program, grow a crop and raise a family for the glory of God.*

This is where swimming and running and dancing and cycling and skating and skiing and singing and composing and writing and playing the saxophone all come in. What do you love to do? Do it! And know that God loves it as much as you do!

**Use the gifts God gave you.** It brings him joy and pleasure. **It is one way we worship.**

Two more important ways we worship God:

Surrender

And Building a Friendship with God.

These are ultimate ways we bring God pleasure.

*The act of personal surrender is called many things: consecration, making Jesus your Lord, taking up your cross, dying to self, yielding to the Spirit. As Warren says, What matters is that you do it, not what you call it.*

Surrender is saying, "Here I am, Lord. I am yours."

Surrender is not giving up activity, but acting FOR God in all situations; it's not being a doormat or a coward, but being courageous FOR HIM; it's not giving up your own thoughts, but USING the mind God gave you; it's not repressing your

personality, but letting God USE the unique person you are. Surrender is letting go of being in charge.

**Surrender to the God revealed in Christ.** It brings him joy and pleasure. **It is one way we worship.**

Finally, God wants to be your best friend. That has always been God's plan for us. The images of the Creation story show this. In Eden God, Adam and Eve all hung around together, just enjoying the cool of the day. God wants us to be together. To live together. To be companions, who share stories, laughter, rest, contentment and even tears.

How do we build friendship with God?

By constant conversation.

By learning about him through the Bible.

By being HONEST, REAL, and authentic with him.

By making our relationship a top priority.

**Let God be your best friend.** It brings him joy and pleasure. **It is one way we worship.**

Psalm 122 celebrates the joy we feel in a PLACE where God has been worshipped for generations. For us, the place is HERE in Baker Memorial United Methodist Church. This is a staging area for God's activity in human lives. Our building is a significant part of this ministry. And our building has some needs. (Invite John Fell to make presentation.)

As we receive Holy Communion today we recognize the friendship we celebrate at that table- friendship among all of us, and friendship with God.

As his friends, let's live in ways that bring God joy, tenderly caring for all the gifts he has given us. AMEN.