

Our Purpose

“Why am I here?”, “Who am I?”, “Where do I belong”. We all desire, consciously or sub-consciously, to have answers to questions such as these. A clear understanding of our purpose (how we answer the fundamental “Why am I here?” question) leads us to answers for other big questions about life concerned with identity and belonging. There are many noble causes that people commit to as a way of providing meaning to their lives, but there is an over-arching reason why God created us. God’s purpose for our lives is closely aligned with His plan to restore and renew His created order, and is concentrated on the major theme of image bearing that is found throughout the Bible.

Opening question: What are some of the good causes that people take up to find meaning in life?

Created in God’s Image but Tarnished by Sin

Genesis 1:26-28

- What does it mean to be created in God’s image?

The Hebrew word for image is *tselem*, which is the same word used for “idol”. In ancient times, people built idols as representatives of their gods. Idols had some characteristics or features of their gods to help them relate to and connect with them. For example, Horus was the Egyptian sky God associated with hunting, and he was depicted as a falcon. In a sense then, God created human beings as his living “idols”, not for the purpose of self-worship but to show the world what He was like and what stood for, to encourage worship of Him.

- Can you think of any other purpose greater than being tasked by God to represent Him and to rule over His good creation in a way that proclaims His goodness and brings life?
- Do you see how other meaningful causes such as those you mentioned earlier, should be guided and controlled by this over-arching image bearing purpose?

Genesis 2:15

- What did God task humankind to do, as His representatives?
- How does sin tend to affect how people use the authority that God has given them?
- What do you think the world would look like if people used their God-given authority to serve and safeguard (a literal translation of how Adam was to care for the garden) rather than to dominate?

Genesis 5:1-3

- After the Fall described in Genesis 3, Adam had a son who was in his (Adam’s) image.
- Why do you think the first person born after sin entered the world, was no longer in the image of God?

We have not fully lost our ability to be like God and to represent him, but we are like a mirror which has become so dirty that it no longer reflects a clear picture. The mirror needs cleaning to properly perform its purpose. Similarly, in our sinful state we need a cleansing intervention to be restored in the image of God. God provided this intervention in the form of a perfect human being, untainted by sin.

The Perfect Image Bearer

Colossians 1:15, 2 Corinthians 4:4

- Who is the perfect image of God? Why has Jesus not lost his ability to perfectly represent the Father?
- Do you see why Jesus could say, “If you have seen me, you have seen the father?” (John 14:9).

Being Restored as Image Bearers

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

- Disciples of Jesus (= those who have entered into the life of the perfect image bearer) are being transformed into the image of God.
- How important is the role of the Holy Spirit in this transformation process?
- How do you think the Spirit brings about transformation which restores us as God's image bearers?

Romans 8:28-29

- What is the good that all things work together to achieve, under God's direction (vs 29)?
- God predestined a special family of all nations to be His agents to bring about transformation, working with His Spirit. Why is our transformation so closely linked with being in God's family/the church?

Fully Restored as Image Bearers

1 John 3:2

- When will disciples of Jesus be fully restored in their God-given purpose to be His image bearers?
- Why is it so important to remember that image restoration is a life-long process, and that we will never be perfect image bearers until Jesus returns?

REFLECTION

- How does it make you feel knowing that God created you to represent Him and to take care of His good creation, starting with caring for your fellow human beings?
- Can you think of a more important and fulfilling meaning of life?
- How would your life change for the better if you were to embrace and live out this calling?
- How connected are you in God's family? Do you see the need for deep friendships in the church to help you to become more like Jesus and equipped for your God-given purpose?