

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

The purpose of life

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Introduction

Years ago I worked for a major department store in Sydney – at one time I was the manager of the cookware department of this store in Parramatta. I noticed a product on the shelf and asked what it was called. No one knew and not surprisingly no one had ever sold one. I discovered the mystery item was a Mongolian Steam boat. I found a woman who could cook and demonstrate and before long we were the leading sellers of Mongolian steamboats in the company. When you find your purpose – you find something of rare value.

God has given each one of us a purpose. We are all uniquely designed and created by him. Stay with us this morning as look to the Old Book and discover together our God-given purpose in life.

Part 1

I make no secret of the fact that one of the joys of my life is reading. As a speaker and occasional writer I am totally indebted to my reading. For me, if I did not read from the old book and widely elsewhere, I would dry up. I would have nothing to say. Often I am asked, “How do you find time to read?” I was reflecting on this the other day and thought over the past 17 years of being a pastor I have often quoted from books, movies, TV and various other sources. As far as I can remember I have never been asked, “How do you have time for TV?” Nor have I ever been asked, “How do you have time for movies?” No - the question I have been asked is about time for reading. But notice what the lack of other questions suggest – we have time for what we value.

I came across this simple inspiring mathematics the other day, actually in a book. Assuming you read slowly (about 250 words a minute) it is easy to calculate that in twenty minutes you can read about 5000 words. An average book has about 400 words to a page. So you could read about 12.5 pages in twenty minutes. Suppose you disciplined yourself to read twenty minutes a day, six days a week for a year. That would be 312 times 12.5 pages for a total of 3900 pages. Assuming that an average book is 250 pages long. That would mean you could read 15 books a year. Twenty minutes could be as simple as muting the ads in your favourite one hour TV program.

Reading is not about time; it's about reading. People who love reading love to find the time. You see, what matters to us gets the time. We carve it out somehow.

Sometimes, up front, but often subtly over the years, people have said to me, “I don't have time for God, church, the bible or prayer.” And if you don't love God, treasure his word, value being with his people or trust in prayer; then you won't carve out the time. But if you do believe, then the time will become a commitment.

We can all get slack. Even devoted readers have bad seasons. People who love God still struggle with priorities but let's be honest; in the end our heart finds its way into our diary, no matter how busy we are.

God demands nothing more than to be God. When he is Number One everything fits around him – not the other way around. When we discover God we begin to discover our God given purpose.

As it says in Deuteronomy 6 verse 5, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

Part 2

In Australia we have an unusual law of making it compulsory to vote at elections. This is unusual as we are one of the few places in the world to do this. Most fear that if it was not compulsory then many, especially the poor, uneducated, aged and slack just would not bother. In the nation of Iraq recently things were very different. To vote meant to risk everything. Insurgents promised to kill any who voted. The world watched and many more voted than most imagined. But the voting was not without incident or tragedy. A number of suicide bombers attacked polling booths. Scores were killed. But without doubt the saddest and cruellest event of the polling day was the death of the suicide bomber, Amar Ahmed Mohammed.

Insurgents for his terrorist mission recruited Amar, a nineteen year old with Down syndrome. His mother, burdened by grief also has to deal with the deception of the men who promised to help her and her family deal with poverty and affliction. She believed her disabled son had found benefactors who could dramatically improve Amar's unfortunate lot in life. Instead he was tricked into becoming a tool in the most deadly game.

The terrorists could find a purpose for this young man and his affliction. But it was not good. Exploitation, injustice, cruelty and lies continue to be the weapons of war. Human life is threatened, human dignity is bypassed and human purpose is exploited by the powerful. It is tempting to see this sort of exploitation as a problem that only occurs in these "rogue states" but a close examination of our own backyard will discover young girls being seduced if not sold into prostitution and children being used for the most shameless of crimes.

The Old Book has such a different hope for humanity. Humans, every one, regardless of race, age, gender, ethnicity and ability or disability bear the creative stamp of God's workmanship. To believe in a Creator is to acknowledge that our dignity and worth lies not in our usefulness but in our design and being. A Creator for good, designed us. We don't always understand why God's workmanship looks inconsistent but in faith we trust a plan that includes the good we were designed to do.

If Darwin was right and the survival of the fittest is our only destiny, then Amar Armed Mohammed did not survive because he was not fit enough. If the old book is right we are still left with many mysteries but also a hope that humans can discover their design features and the blessing that can be found in the goodness that flows.

As the old book says in Ephesians 2:10: For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do

Part 3

It is hard to admit, but I must be going soft in the head. Twenty-something years ago there was a royal wedding that gripped our nation between the young Prince Charles and the beautiful Diana. With glee I avoided taking any notice. Was it my egalitarian republican commitment, my Christian conversion that left me averse to any thought of social class, or my university-driven Marxism? I can't really remember. I do remember phoning a female comrade, or sister, or mate about some issue of vital importance, right in the middle of the wedding. She screamed down the phone at me that this was not the time. "Are you the only person not watching the royal wedding?" was her exasperated cry.

Well the years pass and another royal wedding and couple appear - the Crown Prince of Denmark and our Mary. The girl from Australia who met the Prince at a pub during the Olympics. Keep it quiet - but I watched most of this wedding. We were away and staying in motel. The TV reception was so bad it was hard to tell Mary and the prince apart. Our teenage kids sharing our motel room were not impressed.

And now the couple has been to visit and I watched the TV interview, saw the news and even read the odd story in the paper. I can convince myself that this is different. Mary is an Aussie (after all in a few years it

could have been my daughter) Don't get me wrong - I did not stand in a crowd with Fruit Tingles in my hand ready to shout – "I did but see her pass me by...And yet I love her till I die"! But I have become a softy to a royal love story.

Or is there something deeper? Is there a little part of all of us that believes we could be more than we are? "If Mary can be royal," the Aussies' shout – "why can't I"? Maybe there is something deep within the human soul that earns to be more.

And strangely the old book agrees. For the King of Kings not only calls us to the court to worship, he calls us to fellowship, to know him deeply and to find our purpose in his service. When we understand that the God of all the universe has lifted us up we find purpose in his service. We were indeed shaped for serving God. Our dignity is not found in human acknowledgment alone – but in the grace and love that flows from the One to whom one day all the Kings will bow. To serve each other in the name of the King brings greater honour than a temporary earthly crown.

As the old book says in 1Peter 4:10: "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

Conclusion

So to know God is to know our Creator and the reason behind his creation. To know and love God is to live the way we were designed. As the Jesus in the old book says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your soul and with all your strength."

Father, thank you for the gift of Life. Help us to treasure every day you give us and to find our purpose and hope in your loving embrace – expressed through the love of Christ. Amen