

“Does My Life Have a Purpose?” // Psalm 57 // Question Everything # 4

WELCOME: If you are just joining us, we are at the **end of a 4-week series** on the book of Psalms called *Question Everything*, in which we’re seeing how an ancient collection of songs engages some of our most pressing questions today.

*Week 1: **Can I be Happy?** Week 2: **Is Something Wrong with Me?** Week 3: **Will Life Ever Get Better?** WEEK 4: **“Does God have a purpose for my life?”** I want you to think about this question very personally—not, “Does God have a purpose for the world?” But **does God have a purpose for you, specifically... for your life, and how can you know what it is?***

Few things in life are as important as finding your purpose. When you understand something’s purpose, you can put up with all kinds of inconvenience and pain because of it.

- For example, say your boss asks you to come in one Saturday morning to open up a stack of **10,000 envelopes** and sort through the contents. No overtime pay—just weekend work. You’d be resentful... that would feel like the worst weekend ever! But if he or she told you that in one of those letters was a \$100,000 bonus check, for you, and you needed to find it, opening each of those envelopes you’d be opening them like wonka bars. **Same tedious job; the difference is in your sense of purpose.**
- Or how about this: Trying **being a doctor and tell a woman** that she’s got a condition that is going to make her waistline grow 10 inches and gain 30 lbs over the next few months, and she’ll likely punch you in the face. But my wife has heard that 4 time and she rejoiced at the news, because that means they are pregnant! Again: **The conditions are the same; the difference is the perception of purpose!**

Knowing that God has a purpose for you would transform how you see everything in your life—what you do with your blessings; how to interpret your pain. **So how can you discover that purpose for you?**

P-salm 57

Open your Bible, if you have it...

Do you see the little note at the beginning: **TO THE CHOIRMASTER: TO THE TUNE OF DO NOT DESTROY.** (Which I guess was a popular song at the time— “Do this to the tune of Taylor Swift’s “Shake it Off.”) **A MIKTAM OF DAVID, WHEN HE FLED FROM SAUL, IN THE CAVE.** That’s important context: David wrote this song while hiding in a cave from King Saul, who was trying to kill him because David had been anointed future king of Israel, and Saul, the current king of Israel, didn’t like that. So he chased David out of the country & now has several thousand soldiers scouring the countryside looking for him. **In short, everything has gone wrong for David.**

¹ Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.

(Key verse) ² I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me.

³ He will send from heaven and save me; he will put to shame him who tramples on me. *Selah* God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness! ⁴ My soul is in the midst of lions; I lie down amid fiery beasts— the children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords.

(refrain) ⁵ Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!

⁷ My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast! I will sing and make melody! ⁸ Awake, my glory! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn! ⁹ I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations. ¹⁰ For your steadfast love is great to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.

¹¹ *Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!*

Psalms 57 is a pretty remarkable psalm... because **in spite of all the things** that are going wrong in David's life, in spite of the fact he is suffering innocently, **not one time** does he ask God to change his situation. The only thing he asks throughout the Psalms is "God glorify your name in this situation."

He never says, "Lord, if you would vindicate my name... I don't deserve this; fix it. At least, God, give me some nicer accommodations—this cave is a dump; give Saul hemorrhoids so he feels uncomfortable on his horse and has to go home."

David may want all those things, but he **perceives something bigger** going on in his situation... So rather than asking for anything, he prays (twice) "*Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth.*" "*God, use this situation to let other people see how majestic you are.*"

And David exudes incredible confidence about God answering that prayer:

- In vs. 2, he says, "I know God will **fulfill his purpose** for me."
- In vs. 4, he says, "I will **lie down to rest in the midst** of fiery beasts."
- In vs. 7, he says, "I will arise early in the morning and sing and make melody to the Lord." **Instead of cowering in fear, David is getting a good night sleep and waking up to sing songs of joy!**

I'm going to give you 3 things from this psalm that you can learn about your purpose. (Let me encourage you to take notes: I'm pretty sure, btw, there is a note-taking gate in heaven. I can't prove that; I think it says that somewhere in Deuteronomy, which is where preachers always quote from when they are making stuff up, since no one ever looks in there.)

1. God has a purpose for you—but it's not about you (vv. 5, 11)

You can see this in the refrain that David goes back to again and again. "*God, may you be exalted above the heavens, and let your glory be over all the earth.*" **Superseding David's desire to be rescued is his prayer for God to be glorified.**

The ultimate purpose of your life is not. About. You. You and I **exist** for God's glory. And this is a **hard thing** for people to get sometimes, but the ultimate center of all that happens on earth is the glory of God.

- **Why did God create the earth?** *Ps. 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God."* God wove creation as a tapestry to display his glory.
- **Why did God choose to save Israel?**
 - **Let David answer: Ps 106:8: (8) God saved Israel for his name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power.**
 - **Is 48:9: "For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you..."**
 - **Eze 36:22-23: (22) "Thus says the Lord God: It is for the sake of my holy name that I am about to act...(23) The nations will know that I am the LORD.*"**
- *Paul says in Eph 1:6 that God chose to save us in the way that he did to put on display "his glorious grace."*
- *David says that the reason God continues to work in his life is for the glory of his name. Ps. 23:3, "He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake."*

So what is the ultimate purpose God has for us now? Bringing him glory. That's **why he created us**; it's why he **saved us**.

- Paul would tell us that in everything we do, **whether we eat or drink**, we should do all to the glory of God.

You say, “Wait... that seems pretty self-centered of God (unloving).”

- Let me give you an **analogy**: In order for life on earth to work, the earth has to rotate around the sun. **If the sun was a person and it “loved” the earth**, it would insist that it remain the center of the earth’s orbit. Because for the earth ever to lose the sun at its center would mean certain death.
- That’s **how we are** with God. **Psalm 16:11**, *“In your presence is the fullness of joy and at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”* If God wants us to have these things, he’ll insist we build our lives around him as the center.
 - The essence of the Father is love; God wants us to share in that, so he insists we put him at the center.
- *“If it is right for man to have the glory of God as his goal, can it be wrong for God to have the same goal? If man can have no higher purpose than God’s glory, how can God? If it is wrong for man to seek a lesser end than this, it would be wrong for God, too. The reason it cannot be right for man to live for himself as if he were God is because he is not God. However, it is not wrong for God to seek his own glory, because he is God.”* J.I. Packer, **Hot Tub Religion** (worst named book ever)

The reason this is so hard for us to get is that we are born into life with a completely backwards mentality, thinking we are the center of everything. *Let me walk you through a little history of mankind.* (I heard Andy Stanley talk about this years ago... stuck with me)

- **I already explained that the reason God created the world was to demonstrate his glory.** With the tip of his finger he flung the continents and the galaxies into place. He made the stars and clouds and mountaintops and seas and the atom and the cell.
 - **Every time he creates something new**, the angels he’s created are watching going “Whoa... that’s amazing.”

Then, after everything else had been created, God created a man to share in that glory. Now, this creation was **special**, because God designed this part of his creation “in his own image.”

- **And then, God did the unthinkable...** He handed the brush to us and told us to paint the center. **Creation wasn’t completed yet;** but God wanted us to have a part in it, so he hands us the brush and tells us to paint the center of it.
 - Why? Because he knows what every person who’s ever been in love knows, that it is only love when the person freely chooses you. He wanted a creation centered in love.
- **And we took the brush and we painted in—not God—but ourselves:** “I’m going to be the center. I’m going to be the boss.” That was called “sin.” I PROBLEM.
 - And **every child born** into the world since then arrives with that problem, thinking about his needs; her will. The **two words I never had to teach** my kids were “no” and “mine.” Never had to send my kid to **rebellion camp**; they never had to stay after school to be **tutored in selfishness**: they got those things naturally. From their mom.
- **Our default setting in life is self-centered:**
 - **When you look at a picture...** you determine how good the picture is based on how you look in it. METAPHOR for life. If things are going well for you, things are good.
- **Even in our religion we are selfish:**
 - **Let me summarize some of your prayer lives:** “Gimme, gimme, gimme...” “God **help me** get this; **stop** him, **smite** her, **make everyone behave** the way I want them to so I can be happy... “Hey God, are you **listening**? I’m in the **center**. Take care of **me**.”
 - And **when he doesn’t**, you get angry at him. “Hey God. What’s the problem? Don’t you get it? It’s about my glory and my happiness.”
 - **When you give**, you expect God to be make it worth your while. When the offering bucket comes by, you’re like. “Ahemm (x2). God did you see that? Did you see what I

put in? You owe me, now. You better bless me. Oh Creator of the universe, did you see what I put in your gold plate?"

- **We live as if God exists to glorify us as the center of the universe.** So we put bumper stickers on our cars that say, "God is my co-pilot" and worship God as the best means to "my best life now."
 - And if **God doesn't behave**, we're like, "The nerve of that guy!"
 - And we **walk around confused**, saying, "God, how am I supposed to **defend to everyone** that you're a good God? I just **don't understand** you. **What are you up to?**"
- **And God says, "What am I up to? My glory."** You say, "God, what about my glory?" "I'm not that concerned about yours."

You say, "I still feel like it's not loving for God to seek his own glory." Well, let's talk about how God pursued his glory after we rejected him.

What do you do when your prize creation **hijacks the rest of your creation** and makes it about them?

- You know, **governments in Jesus' day** had a very simple answer. You go in and you crush them! When the Jews dared rebel against the Romans, the Romans came down, strung up thousands of their men and women on **crosses**; tore down their walls, and then built the **Triumphal Arch of Titus** to celebrate their victory and made up songs.

What did Jesus do when we had flaunted his glory? Crush us? Set up an arch of triumph in heaven and have angels sing song about how quickly he destroyed us? Let me show you

Phil 2:6 *Though Jesus was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, (7) but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant. (8) and he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

- **How did God's Son react when we usurped his glory?**

- **He did what you and I would never do!** He came to earth and took the form of a servant and died for our sins in our place.
 - When he arrived on earth, he never played the **God-card**, which is what I would have done. **In a restaurant:** "Excuse me, could we get **some service** over here... you know, I'm God." "Excuse me. I believe you're **sitting in my seat**, I'm God."
 - **And then, instead of crushing** the traitors; he offered himself up to be crushed by them... while they taunted him!
 - Most of us would have a hard enough time **dying for a friend**. But here he died for his enemies as they spit in his face and mocked him.
- In other words, God said, "*You **painted me out of the picture**; you **shoved me to the side**, you **rebelled against me**. And so here's what I will do... I'll show you..." And he **mounted his warhorse** and left heaven. And **as he traveled** to earth, he started to de-robe, laying aside his glory... **Angels looked on** perplexed, "What is he doing?" And then he was born into a stable; took the form of a servant and died at the hands of traitors like us... as a sacrifice for their sins so we could share in the joys of his glory.*
- **His glory was not a selfish glory; it was a giving, sharing glory.**

(9) *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, (10) so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

You can almost hear Paul saying, "**Is he not worthy to receive glory from you?**" He's TWICE WORTHY of all the glory in your life: once as your Creator and 2ndly as your Savior.

His glory was not a selfish glory that crushed us when we rebelled; it was a glory that sacrificed himself to save us!

How can we who have experienced that not rise up to give him glory?

David gets that. “This whole thing is not about me. It’s about God.”

You’ll never understand your purpose until you get that:

- SICKNESS/ MISSED OPPS

Many of you are at a place where you want to God back into your life. You’re getting back into church... you realize something has been **missing...** maybe you **just had kids** (that does it for a lot of people)... And **that’s great.** But I want to keep you from a mistake that a lot of people make, and that is simply to make God a part of your life: **I need him** to be happy in life, have a good family. Of course, I don’t want to go to hell...

- You don’t come to God to make him a part of your life; you wake up to realize you were **created for him.**
- You need to have a COPERNICAN REVOLUTION OF THE SOUL... **Jesus didn’t come to be an important planet in your solar system; he came to be center of it.**

2. God has a purpose for you—and it’s mostly about what he’s doing in you (v. 1)

- **God is more interested in your character than your comfort.**
 - This life, after all, is just a warm-up act for eternity. We’ll live here less than 100 years. We’ll live in eternity 100 trillion years.
- **He is more interested in making you holy rather than just happy**

Notice how many times in vs. 1 David talks about his soul finding refuge in God:

¹ “Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.”

David’s refuge was not in the cave where he was hiding.

- ...**In the army** he had gathered about him. Saul’s army was 10x as big.
- **It was not in the fact** that he was bullseye with a slingshot. Slingshot is great...
- It wasn’t in his **innocence.** No, he keeps crying out for God’s mercy.
- His refuge was in God’s steadfast love and grace.
- **That’s what he ran into; that’s where he slept.**

*God’s purpose in all of this was to teach David to make his presence his refuge. **That’s his purpose for you, too.***

You see, God’s purpose for you is not so much something you do for him but the way you learn to depend on him. We serve a God who has no needs, so what we become in him is more important than what we do for him.

I love Isaiah says it:

Isa 43:10–11 “You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen, **Why are we chosen?** that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. ¹¹ I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior.

We’re not chosen because God has something he needs us to do, but for something God wants us to understand and testify to: That God is the only reliable savior. Refuge. Again: *God has no needs; so what we do for him is not nearly as important as who we become in him.*

So sometimes he attacks our places of refuge to teach us they aren't permanent. Like David, he drives you from your country (even though you're innocent) and puts you in the wilderness so you'll learn to find your home; your security; your identity in him.

- Like David, he puts you in a cave with fiery beasts circling outside to teach you to depend on him.
- **All refuges fail.** You have a refuge. It will fail.
 - Your own abilities. I always get back up (get knocked down)... what doesn't kill me makes me stronger.
 - Stocks fail, or they can't protect you in death...
 - Maybe your refuge is just a way to cope... (bestie to complain to; pleasure to dull the pain)... that fails. When it wears off.
- ***He attacks your places of refuge and reveals your inabilities because he wants his mercy to be your primary place of refuge...***
 - V and I: **Parenting study**

God has a purpose for you—and it's about what he's doing in you.

- ***God is more interested in your character than your comfort.***
- And once you get that... some of what God is doing in your life may make more sense.

3. God has a purpose for you—and if you are surrendered to it, he will fulfill it (v. 2).

David says in vs 2, "God will fulfill his purpose for me." "Fulfills" in Hebrew: *gamar* "to bring to an end, complete."

- David makes the same statement in **Ps. 138:8**. "God will fulfill his purpose for me... (and then he adds) **he will not forsake the work of his hands.**"
 - I'm always telling my kids, "Finish what you start." **Illus. Coloring book with a streak of color** on every page. **FINISH!** *You* are what God has started, you are the work of his hands, and *God always finishes what he starts.*
- **God is a perfectionist**, you see, when it comes to his purposes, and he will not let anything come in the way of what he is doing.

- **For David, this means God will save him from the wicked plans of others**
 - **Vs. 3, 6, You overrule all their evil plans for good.**
- **He also saves us from our own stupid decisions.** That's why David calls out for mercy. Mercy implies that David realizes he has made mistakes.
 - I think back about how I got to where I am in life... and the path has been filled with a lot of stupid, sometimes sinful, and sometimes completely random decisions.
 - **Dennis:** made a foolish decision and went to prison. In prison, God led him to people in our ministry, and now he feels called to mission work after he gets out. God took a foolish decision that landed him in prison and used it for his plan.
 - **Veronica and UVA. Sinful decision—greatest thing in her life**
- Not saying it is ok to make bad decisions... just that **when you surrender to God's purposes**, he has a way of weaving everything, absolutely everything... toward his purposes.

The irony... only when you say, "I don't want to be the center of the universe," that God reorders all things in the universe to fulfill his purpose for you. Make yourself the center of the universe, and nothing will work for you. Make him the center of your universe, and the entire cosmos is realigned for God to fulfill his purposes for you.

We've talked about this promise for the last few weeks Let's look at it. **Romans 8:28** ²⁸ **And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,** (For those who love *God*, not themselves... Again, the irony: if you love yourself most, and want everything to work out good for you, it won't. If you love God and make him the center, he weaves all things, even the hard things, into his beautiful good tapestry of your life).

He does it **...for those who are called according to his purpose.** (And what is that purpose?)²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also **predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son,** God's purpose is to make you like Jesus. (**comfort/character; temporary happiness/holiness.**)

And he's predestined that will happen: **And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.** Romans 8:28–30

- God always finishes what he starts. **He'll see it through.** Once he puts you on that train, there's no getting off. He's taking you the station of glorification.
- So we can **be confident**, Paul says in Phil 1:6, that he that has begun a good work in us *will* complete it.

When you surrender to God's purpose, the power of that promise becomes your refuge. Then like David, you can **lie down to sleep** even in the midst of fiery beasts (v. 4); (vs. 7) you can **rise up with joyful song** even in the midst of heartache. **Out of the dark caves** of your discouragement and your depression we'll hear songs of praise.

God has a purpose for you: he wants to use you to exalt his name in the earth and he wants to teach you to trust him. Are you pursuing that—discovering that?

- In your **SITUATION** now... **It's ok to pray for God to change the situation.** But are you praying, **"God, glorify your name** through me in this?" **"Help me know you more?"** Don't waste your pain. A gift.
- **Students:** What is your **primary objective** in college? Good grades; social circle... those are great. But the one objective that must trump them all is **bringing God glory** and **spreading it** on your campus. And **discovering what God has called you** to in life as your means of spreading his glory.
 - COLLEGE CONF. We have calling all wrong: As if it's something special. All of us are called to leverage our lives

for the spread of God's glory on earth—in the spread of the gospel and other things. Come here how you can know that. **GRAD STUDENTS, TOO**

- **Athlete:** what is your objective?
- **Business professional:** Are you leveraging your talents and resources to bring God glory, or to pursue your own kingdom? Is your prayer about how God can make your business work... for you, or how he will use it to glorify his name throughout the earth?
- **Mother,** as you raise your children... Is your **primary goal** raising kids that glorify God, and who will grow up and follow God anywhere he sends them to spread his glory in the earth?

The success of any life is measured solely by whether it discovered its purpose to glorify God.*

The Christian life is simple: Receiving God's glorious grace as a free gift (THE GOSPEL IS... God created you for himself, to love you and share himself with you, and loved you so that after you rejected he came and gave himself for you, if you will only receive it)

and then spending the rest of your days spreading his glory by telling others about what Jesus has done for you—how he dragged you out of the burning building of sin and set your feet on a rock in safety and inviting them do experience the same if they never have.

*Opt. Story:

One story in conclusion:

A few years ago, our church received news that "Clara," a single girl in her 20's that had joined up with one of our mission teams in Central Asia, had been kidnapped by Islamic fundamentalists.

Let me allow our team leader to tell the story in his words:

For 3 months she was missing, and then we got word through a local source that she was being held captive in the mountains. I and a few others from our team ended up negotiating with the hostage takers for six months. During that time, we received news that she was being moved around to keep her hidden. The US military tried several rescue attempts. In fact, it was the same military unit that did the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound—Seal Team 6—that was tasked with trying to rescue her. Twice they got very close. One of those times, we found out later, she had been moved to a neighboring house as the troops arrived. Another time she was hidden in the basement of the house, and the rescue team just missed her. You can only imagine the frustration Clara must have felt to hear her rescuers just feet away, and then to realize that the attempt had failed.

I wish I could share with you this story ends happily. But this story has no real ending. We do not know exactly what happened to Clara. She kept being moved from village to village, handed off from one group of rogue men to another. The last we heard she was handed over to a nomadic group of arms smugglers that wandered through the “Desert of Death” in Central Asia. And then she disappeared.

Is she an extraordinary hero of faith? Well, in a sense she was... But, honestly, it's hard for me to think of her in the “hero” category. If I sit and remember her as she was, she was a regular woman from the Southern United States. A friendly, smiling, friend. A person who struggled along with the rest of us when it was hot, and who loved to go on vacation. A regular American girl who decided to step out in faith...

The only reason she came to Central Asia was she wanted Muslims here to understand the gospel. It was her understanding of what Christ had done for her on the cross, and how he “made himself nothing, taking the form of a

servant”, that led her to leave her life in the suburban American Southeast to move to one of the most forsaken places on earth, a place where... windows had to have blast film because of the risk of explosions at any time, a place where there was no electricity to run a fan in the 100 degree heat in the summer... a place where an armed Islamic group that is hostile to the gospel operates with impunity. She did this because she understood that Christ had come to earth to face even greater dangers, even more separation from his father, even more discomfort for our sake.

It is about these people knowing his glory, and him receiving the reward of the sacrifice we have made.