

Doubt: Darkside of Faith II

Why Me?

September 16, 2012

PRELUDE – Great God Who Saves

**Worship Songs – Happy Day / 10,000
Reasons (Wondrous Love)**

Feature – “Why Georgia”

Good morning everyone.

That song¹ is a great way to introduce today's message which is the next-to-last in our current series “Doubt: Dark Side of Faith.” It's hard to believe we started this series way back in the first week of July which makes it by far the longest series we've done in the history of NHCC. So, lucky you – you get to be

part of making history. 😊

In any case, as I said, that John Mayer tune is a great way to raise the doubt we're going to address in today's message: *What should be the outcome of a still verdict-less life? Are we living it right? Why, Georgia (or Sally or Sam), are we here in the first place? What is our purpose? Is there a purpose?*

That's a question – a doubt, actually – that many people in our congregation expressed in some of the statements and questions turned in on those doubt lists we all wrote out a couple months ago. For example, one person wrote:

- Does my life matter to God?

- Does God really care what I do for a living or where I live?
- Can God's plan overcome my past?
- Why does God have me where I am?
- Why do I feel as if I have no gifts and others have it all?
- I doubt my ability to be the kind of testimony I need to be because of my pain.
- What does God want me to do with my life?

Of course, we are not alone in those kinds of questions and doubts. If you could ask 100 people, 90 of them wouldn't know the answer to the question "what is your purpose in life?"

But it's one of the things we all *wish* we knew. A lot of us wish that God would just leave a note under our pillow so we could be sure. Or maybe that He would somehow arrange our circumstances in such a way that we couldn't miss it ... kind of like what happened in this scene from a very funny movie called *Evan Almighty*.

Video clip – Evan Almighty (2:30)

"I want *you*, Evan Baxter, to build an ark." And if you watch the rest of the movie, you see that, in spite of his initial hesitancy, Evan comes to the conclusion that this is why he's here. This is his purpose in life.

Unfortunately, very rarely does something like that happen outside of Hollywood, so my goal in the time we have this morning is to help us get a vision for what our purpose is ... even if God doesn't leave a note on the pillow or a pile of lumber in front of our house.

Why We Doubt

But, let's talk for a few minutes about *why* we sometimes doubt that there is a purpose for our lives. As I thought about what I've seen and heard from people over the years and also what I've observed in my own life, I think there are at least four reasons why we doubt. See if any of these apply to you.

The most significant reason we doubt there is a purpose is that it's one of ...

1. The implications of atheistic evolution which claims that "everything exists by accident."

According to atheistic evolution, "everything that is" is the result of a grand cosmic accident that took place billions and billions of years ago. We got lucky, so to speak and that's why we're here.

And since we're all just a product of chance, according to atheistic evolution, there can be no transcendent purpose inherent in the human race. And since there is no transcendent purpose inherent to the human race, there can be no transcendent purpose

to any specific human being. You and I are simply blobs of intelligent matter making the best of it until we slip away into the darkness never to be heard from again.

And since most of us have been indoctrinated with this viewpoint from childhood, it's easy to see why we might doubt that there is a purpose to our lives.

But another reason we doubt that our lives have purpose is the ...

2. The combined effect of trials and trivialities.

For a lot of people, life seems to be one trial after another – one bad

circumstance followed by another, one failure after another.

If that's your experience, at some point it makes you wonder: is the goal merely to survive until the next wave comes crashing down on your head? If so, it doesn't seem like much of a purpose.

For others, life seems to be a string of endless trivialities. I like the way one writer explains it, she writes:

I hate to say it, but at times my life seems completely forgettable. No sooner do I empty the dishwasher than my son dirties another plate. I spend hours cooking only to have my family inhale it in minutes and then ask, "What's for dessert?"

Before the laundry is even out of the dryer, the hamper is full again.

It all seems so forgettable, trivial, and completely unrelated to the greater meaning of the universe.ⁱⁱ

I think another reason why we doubt that we have purpose comes from ...

3. Comparing ourselves to others (specifically the idea that “I’m not making the same kind of contribution to this world that he or she is.”)

It’s so easy to look around and see people who, in our thinking, are making a “real difference” while we just continue to muddle along.

- “I just change diapers and make

PB&J sandwiches. She has a job that impacts the real world.”

- “I just sell Twinkies and firecrackers – she’s a stay-at-home mom impacting the next generation.”
- “I’m just a schoolteacher. He’s a pastor.”
- “I can’t sing like she does.
- “I can’t think on my feet and explain things like he does.”

And the list could go on and on. Comparing ourselves to others can cause us to doubt there is a purpose to

our own lives.

One more reason why I think we sometimes doubt there is a purpose for our existence – and I want to spend a few minutes on this one because it's so prevalent among Christians, maybe more so than others – is that ...

4. We mistakenly equate “calling” with “purpose.”

A calling is something that God clearly tells someone to do whether it's “build an ark of gopher wood” or “become a mom and raise kids” or “invent a better gizmo for gizmo users” or “start a church.” And a calling might be something that lasts for a couple days or weeks or months. Or it might last for

years.

However, reality is that a lot of people never do sense a particular calling in their life. They never have “the Evan Baxter” experience. And that’s normal. That’s okay. But, because they equate “calling” with “purpose” they begin to question why they’re here in the first place.

By the way, the irony of the “Evan Baxter experience” is that if we do have such an experience – if, somewhere along the way, God communicates to us that He does have something special for us to do, once that task is complete, if you have equated calling with purpose, you end up in the same place as people who never sensed a calling:

feeling lost and wondering what you're here for.

That's why women who, at one point, were totally convinced that the reason God put them on this earth was to be a momma and threw everything they had into being a momma ... when their kids grew up and left the nest ... those women were left struggling with their reason for existence. They confused calling with purpose.

That's why a lot of men who define their purpose in life as their career are lost when retirement comes. Their job was their reason for being and now that reason is gone.

Even those who have a ministry calling

will face the same issue. Years ago, I was convinced that God was calling me to start a church that people who didn't like church could connect with. And out of that conviction – calling – came NHCC. But the day is coming when I will no longer be the pastor of NHCC. (I hope it's not soon, but the day is coming!) And when it does come, if I have equated calling with purpose then I will begin to doubt my reason for being on this earth.

- The implications of atheistic evolution: "everything – including me – is a cosmic accident."
- The combined effect of trials and

trivialities.

- Comparing ourselves to others.
- Mistakenly equating “calling” with purpose.

Those are some of the reasons why we struggle with believing there really is a purpose for our lives, specifically, on this earth.

Any of them apply to you? If you're struggling with a sense of purpose, I'd bet at least a couple of them do!

Possibilities

However – and this, I hope, is encouraging – in spite of the fact that many of us struggle at times to believe

it, the overwhelming testimony of the scripture and the church throughout the ages is that human beings in general (and you and me in specific) are *not without purpose and meaning*. In fact, if you just type "What is God's purpose for my life" into your favorite search engine, you will come up with page after page of biblically-based articles and sermons and blogs representing various biblical schools of thought on the matter.

For instance, somewhere in those links you'll find it said that ...

Our purpose is to love God and be loved by God.

And when you consider the

overwhelming emphasis in the scripture on the relationship between God and humans, it's hard to disagree with that.

You'll also come across teaching that says ...

God's purpose for us is that we become like Jesus in our character.

I'm sure you've heard that idea before. We've talked about it a lot around here. And when you consider the vast amount of teaching in the New Testament having to do with personal transformation, it's hard to disagree with that purpose statement.

Those of you from a Reformed Church

background will recognize this one. The Westminster Catechism begins with the question: *What is the chief and highest end of man?* In other words, "what is our purpose? Why are we here?"

Answer: Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him forever.

And with all the theology and tradition behind the Reformed Churches, it's hard to disagree with that. It lines up well with Jesus telling his disciples that the first thing they were to pray for was God's glory: "hallowed be Thy name" and that Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:31: "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Along the same lines, in your search

you'll probably come across this quote from the great Puritan pastor and writer, Jonathan Edwards ...

... who once said ...

"God's purpose for my life was that I have a passion for God's glory and that I have a passion for my joy in that glory, and that these two are one passion."

I read that and I think, that guy was *really deep*, way deeper than I'll ever be.

Someone else (who thought in simpler terms than Edwards) once defined the purpose of human beings as ...

“To know God and to make Him known.”

That’s cool because it covers the relational aspect between us and God but it doesn’t stay fully-focused on just me and Jesus. “To make Him known” implies some kind of connection with “the world out there.”

And, of course, if you search for the answer to the question of “what is God’s purpose for my life” ...

... you’re going to find many references to Rick Warren’s excellent book, *The Purpose Driven Life* ...

... in which he says human beings actually have *five* purposes.

- You were planned for God's pleasure - to know him and love him;
- You were formed for God's family - to find a home and family (specifically, in the Body of Christ – the church)
- You were created to become like Christ - with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control as increasing qualities of your character.
- You were shaped for serving God - with a unique mix of talents, skills and passion.
- You were made for a mission - to introduce other people to God and these five purposes for their lives.

And it's hard to disagree with any of what Rick says since it encompasses several of the other answers.

In the Beginningⁱⁱⁱ

The bottom line, I really like *all* of these answers because I think they all capture something of the grander vision of which the Bible says that human beings are a part.

But I also have to say that I think in some ways they miss the point. To me, they seem more like goals than purpose. They seem to answer the question of "what should we do" rather than "who am I and why am I here in

the first place?”

And they seem to be a little too slanted towards the spiritual dimension when what most of us need is something that applies to everyday life – whether that everyday life is filled with making dinners or starting churches or just trying to keep our head above water in whatever crisis we find ourselves in today. If there was a way to answer the question of purpose in relation to *those kinds of things*, that would go a long way for most of us.

Fortunately, the Bible *does* give that kind of an answer. In its opening pages it clearly explains “who we are and why we’re here in the first place” ... which makes sense since the opening pages

describe God's intentions when He created the world and everything in it (regardless of whether it took billions or thousands of years).

So, let's take a minute and read part of it. Genesis chapter one tells us that after everything else had been created and was in place ...

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground." Genesis 1:26 (NLT)

So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27 (NLT)

Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground." Genesis 1:28 (NLT)

See, before there is even one word about relationships with others or even with God; before there is even one word about the kind of good and holy life God desires all people to live; before there is even one word about the

church or evangelism or missions, God issues this mandate that covers all of humanity: "Take what I have begun in this Earth and manage it in such a way that it comes to full fruition. I started it – you take it and run with it; you finish it."

Now, there is a single word that describes this kind of purpose better than any other word that I can think of. Unfortunately, however, it also has some baggage with it so I'm hesitant to use it. But, really, there is no better word. So try not to groan when I say it.

Based on the creation mandate, it can be argued that our primary purpose in this life is to be a *steward*.

And before you think, "oh no, here it comes – a talk about money,"

understand that while the word "steward" does have something to do with money it's not *just* about money.

By definition, a steward is a person who is responsible for managing the finances, property, household and estate of another. In fact, the word comes from the old English "sty-wald" which means "house guardian." We are each guardians of a little part of God's house. We are each given a little piece of this world where we are in control and are given authority to take that little piece and help it grow and thrive. "Be fruitful and multiply," God said. "Take this and make it even better."

So, based on the first chapter of

Genesis, in answer to the question of “who am I and why am I here?” I would say ...

“I am a steward. And I am here to reflect God – that’s what it means to be made in His image – I am here to reflect God by making the world a better place using whatever He puts in my hands.”

And He has put much into my hands – as He has into yours: time, talents, personality, possessions, income, home, relationships, mind, body, family, history, job, education, hobbies, church, and faith in Christ. *All of those things* can be creatively leveraged to do what God did in creation: to make this little slice of the world that I get to impact a better place; to help it grow and thrive

... because I am created to be a steward.

Now, having given that answer, let me also add that I wouldn't arm wrestle anyone over this. 😊 If you study the scriptures and you come up with something else to describe who we are and why we're here that's great. Or, if you prefer one of the other possibilities that we saw earlier, that's great, too.

But let me tell you why I like this particular way of talking about purpose.

1. For one thing, Jesus and the Apostles use the same imagery.

For example Peter writes ...

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10 (NIV)

And Paul uses it to describe his own purpose in life.

*This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.
1 Corinthians 4:1 (ESV)*

Then, of course, Jesus uses this on several occasions, most famously in what we call the parable of the talents. If you've been in church for any time at all, I'm sure you've heard it.

Matthew 25 records Jesus as saying

...

The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. Matthew 25:14 (NLT)

In other words, these guys were stewards. They were given responsibility to manage his property in his absence.

Jesus goes on to say that ...

He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of

silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities to manage. He then left on his trip.

When he returned he discovered that the first two had creatively invested and doubled what he had entrusted to them. To each of them ...

The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'

But the third servant did not invest. Instead he gave an excuse:

'I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.'

"But the master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! ... why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.'

"Then he ordered, 'Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver.

And Jesus gave this interpretation:

'To those who use well what they are given, even

more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away.”

*Matthew 25:28-29
(NLT)*

And that leads to the second reason I believe this way of thinking, this idea of stewardship, makes sense.

2. Stewardship is how God says He will judge us.

“Now, wait a minute, Rick, you’re really confusing me. I thought this was a grace church. We don’t earn our way to Heaven because Jesus died on the cross for us. We don’t have to go thru judgment because of what he did on

the cross.”

Here's the deal. We don't go thru *judgment for sin*, that's very clear, because of what Jesus did on the cross for us, but we do go thru judgment for what we do with what God gives us.

For we (followers of Christ) must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” 2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)

Jesus, in his teachings in the gospel, promised again and again outlandish rewards for serving him and being a

steward and making the most of what He gives us. And, he also promised penalty for wasting what we've been given.

Another reason I like this idea of thinking of our purpose in terms of stewardship is that ...

3. It “works” whether we have a calling or not.

Even if you're not sure you have a calling to whatever you're doing, reality is *you're doing something right now*. And you can be a steward of whatever that is. You can use that to somehow make the world a better place.

For example ... if you're married ... you

can actually be a steward of your spouse. In fact, the Apostle Paul said that's the job of a husband. He says the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. A lot of guys and gals read that and go, "oh, they're keeping women down," and, "he gets to boss me around." That's not what it means at all. The word actually means source – the husband is the source of the wife, just like Christ is the source of the church. The husband's job is to create an environment that allows this woman, and the children if there are children, to grow and become everything God wants them to be. It's a beautiful picture. He's a steward of his spouse.

It kind of applies to this church, as well.

I mean, everyone sitting here this morning ... you are a part of this church. God has called you here for some reason, he's allowed you to be here for some reason, or you stumbled in here for some reason. I don't know why you're here, but *you're here*. And you can be a steward of this church, and this church is going to grow and blossom because of who you are. The people around you are going to grow and blossom because of your involvement in this church.

For example, when the day comes that I no longer pastor this church or any other church, my calling will have ended but my purpose will be the same. I will still be a steward – here to reflect God by making the world a

better place using whatever He puts in my hands at that point in my life.

Stewardship isn't dependent on calling. It works no matter what your situation is.

4. Along the same lines, you can be a steward in spite of trials and trivialities of your life.

In fact, you can be a *steward* of the trials and trivialities.

Paul writes ...

*God is our merciful Father
and the source of all
comfort.*

Now, catch this, he says,

He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. 2 Corinthians 1:4 (NLT)

When you are in the middle of a trial, you can say "I'm gaining something out of this experience that one day soon I will be able to use to help someone else." That's stewardship. That's purpose even when it doesn't feel like there is purpose. Those trials and trivialities are opportunities to make something better for other people.

Another reason I like the stewardship angle is that ...

5. It means that *everyone* has something to offer. We are not to under-value ourselves or others through comparisons.

We all have something in our hands, Jesus said. Some of us have five bags of silver, to use Jesus' metaphor, some have two and some have one. But everyone has something because everyone is created to be a steward.

The stewardship view of purpose also ...

6. Allows for great creative freedom in how we use the resources given to us.

... and this is another reason I like it.

As we talked about a couple of weeks ago, there is no divine blueprint for our lives but there is a gameplan. Remember that? That means you and I get to make the call in many, many things ... which is exactly what a steward does. The owner turns over the resources to the steward and says "you make the decisions within this framework."

The final reason (at least the final reason that I will share this morning – there are others) ... the final reason why I like the stewardship view of our purpose is that ...

7. It's holistic in scope. It includes but is not limited to the redemptive work of God in Jesus.

So many of the other definitions we looked at and sometimes hear in church seem to only focus on the teaching of the NT: that part of making the world a better place includes pointing people to Christ and His Kingdom. And that's true, that the world will only become a better place through the redemption of Christ. But God's purpose for humanity existed before the fall and before the curse of sin ... and the idea of stewardship captures that very well.

So What?

Now, I've covered a lot of ground here and some of you may go, "man, I've got to think this through." And, again, I

would not arm wrestle anyone over this. However, I think you could do a lot worse than thinking of your purpose in terms of being a steward who is here to reflect God by making this world a better place using whatever God has put into your hands right now.

So, as we close this morning and our band gets into place, even if you don't want to stand up and go, "yeah, Rick, thank you for finally clearing it up for me. Now I know my purpose in life – I'm a steward," I want to ask you to think about this issue because the clear teaching of scripture is that we are stewards (even if I'm way off and it's not our primary purpose – we are stewards).

So, the question is ...

- What kind of a steward are you of everything you have?
- Are you even aware that you are, in the sight of God, a steward?
- Are you missing out on opportunities to be a steward of whatever God has given you right now because you can't figure out your calling? And, you're so consumed with what that is that you're overlooking what is right in front of you, even though it might be trivial or it might be a trial?
- What would it look like if you began

to believe what God says? That you are not a cosmic accident. That no matter where you are and what you have to work with, you can in some way creatively use that to make this world a better place in some way or another?

- How would that work out in your family? What would that do to your relationships? How would that change the way you treat your body? The way you use your time? And yes, even in what you do with your money?

Listen – there's no question that God loves us; that we are saved by grace; that we belong to him and we matter to Him greatly; but God has made us

stewards of a little piece of this world and one day you and I will give an account for our stewardship of it.

So, let's ask for Him to help us get that image in mind and to begin to live it out.

Jesus, that is our request of you this morning. This may be a new thought for some of us, a new framework of how to look at "man, what am I here for?"

And God, I know that a lot of us have messed up on this. I mess up on this all the time and I am so thankful for the grace that's in Jesus, that even when we fail as a steward, there's grace and forgiveness. But God, you want us to be more than forgiven. You want

us to be useful; you want us to be people who are actually reflecting your image in how we take these things you've given us, even the trivialities, even the trials, and use them in a way that causes things to flourish and grow. God, give us a vision for that. Give us a passion. Speak to us even today about where to begin on this.

We thank you that you love us. We thank you that we belong to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Feature – “Remind Me Who I Am”

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Church 101 this afternoon

Endnotes

ⁱ I'm referring to John Mayer's "Why Georgia" which immediately preceded this message.

ⁱⁱ See [www.lifecoachingforchristianwomen.com/resources/self-directed-coaching/article-index/spiritual-growth-gods-pur](http://www.lifecoachingforchristianwomen.com/resources/self-directed-coaching/article-index/spiritual-growth-gods-purpose-for-your-life/)pose-for-your-life/

ⁱⁱⁱ This section inspired by Rev. Laura Heikes of Bee Creek UMC message of 5/15/11 "I am a _____." See www.beecreekumc.org/media.php?pageID=15