

Trapper John is exploring God. For the next seven weeks I want to invite you to explore God too. Some of you, maybe most of you, have already discovered God. But many people you know are troubled by questions such as:

“If God exists, why is He so shy? He seems to be playing hide and seek.”

“If God exists, why doesn't He do something about this mess on planet earth?”

“If God exists, is He (or She) Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or other?”

“If God exists, what does He want from me?”

These are the kinds of questions we are going to consider over the next seven weeks. Explore God is simply an invitation to ease off the road for a season and think about the things that matter most. Today we are going to begin our expedition with the question, “Does life have a purpose?” If you're like most people there are times when you have felt like you're just going in circles.

I have a train set in the trunk of my car. My step dad was getting rid of stuff that he has had for years and when I saw the train set I asked if I could have it. I said it was for my grandson but that's only half true. I had one as a kid. I stopped playing with it when I discovered that it just goes in circles. Ever felt that way? What's the point?

People will go to great lengths to make life meaningful. Rafael Lozano took an interesting approach to finding purpose in life. Lozano is a 42-year-old coffee fanatic in Houston who has made it his purpose to visit every Starbucks in the world. Seems impossible since Starbucks operates on almost every corner of every street of every city in America, not to mention thousands of stores around the world but Lozano has already been to 11,676 Starbucks stores and he won't rest until he's been to all of them.

That may sound strange but not nearly as strange as the story of Lawnchair Larry Walters. On July 2, 1982, Walters decided to tie a few weather balloons to his lawn chair so he could float around his SoCal neighborhood for a while. Armed with a pellet gun, he planned to shoot the balloons one at a time until he came back to earth. He climbed up on his girlfriend's roof and began tying 40 balloons to the chair. When the rope holding him to the roof broke, Walters went up so fast he dropped the gun and held on for dear life. A commercial airplane called him in at 11,000 feet. After several hours he began to descend where reporters were waiting to get a story. When they asked him the inevitable “why” question, all Walters could say was, “You can't just sit there. You have to do something.”

The rest of the story is not nearly so funny. Ten years after his famed lawnchair launch, Larry Walters hiked to a remote canyon in the Angeles National Forest and took his own life. His search for meaning and purpose ended tragically at the age of 44.

If you have ever wondered about the purpose of life you are not alone. I want to invite you to peek into the journal of a man who went on a long, exhaustive search for purpose and discovered that nothing on earth results in lasting significance or personal satisfaction. His God-given name was Jediah, but his father David called him Solomon. Solomon had it all – wealth, palaces, servants, beautiful women, power and prestige. But as he grew old he concluded that there is never enough money, fashionable clothes, fast enough chariots, modern enough gadgets, or romantic enough relationships. No man is

ever strong enough and no woman beautiful enough. It seems that the older we get the farther we get from finding the satisfaction we once pursued. Solomon said it this way in Ecc. 1:1-11.

Life is vanity, meaningless, a vapor, a puff of smoke, a cipher, zip, zilch, nada, nothing! Solomon went on to identify the usual suspects that rob life of its meaning:

1. Death makes life seem meaningless. 2:12-17; 3:19-20. A more recent observer says it this way, “If you decide to knock yourself out getting rich and living it up, all you have to show for it in the end is the biggest income tax in town and a bad liver. And when you finally kick the bucket, the chances are that your dim-witted heirs will sink the whole thing in a phony Florida real estate deal or lose it at the track in Saratoga. If you decide to break your back getting a decent education and end up a Columbia Ph.D. and an adviser to presidents, you’ll be just as dead when the time comes as the high school dropout who went into sausage-stuffing, and you’ll be forgotten just about as soon.” Beuchner

2. Injustice makes life seem meaningless. 3:16; 7:15. Maybe we will be rewarded for doing good things yet we see good people cut off and bad people flourish.

3. Work makes life seem meaningless. 2:18-23. Yet still, in every human heart, there is a craving for meaning, a passion for purpose. That’s because, according to Solomon, God has put eternity in our hearts (3:11). We long for that which is eternal and transcendent. This yearning is what separates us from animals. Even little kids have a sense of purpose. They want to grow up and be somebody. You never hear a kid say, “Well, you color for a little while and then you die.” You have never seen angst in a dog because they were not reaching their potential? “I’m so stupid. I can’t even figure out which side of the tree to walk on.” Only we humans go on this lifelong search to discover the meaning of life. So where do we look?

1. Naturalists search for meaning in nature...2:5-6. We worship the rocks and the trees and the animals in the forest...until we discover that nature isn’t always so friendly. “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger...except for bears – they kill you.”

Environmentalists tell us that coal is bad but solar power is good. I was in my hometown in California a couple of weeks ago where they now have dozens of solar plants scattered throughout the Mojave Desert. Solar power, an environmentalists dream, is becoming a nightmare. Every two minutes a falcon, a hawk, a warbler or a sparrow is incinerated by the intense heat generated by thousands of garage-sized mirrors that reflect the sun in a concentrated area. They are called “streamers” because as they fly through the area they spontaneously burst into flame and fall to the ground followed by a trail of smoke.

C. S. Lewis in the *Weight of Glory* observed, “**At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get in.**”

2. Hedonists search for meaning in pleasure. 2:1-3.

3. Activists search for meaning in achievement. 2:4-11. Brady clip... So if you are wondering about the purpose of God I have some bad news and some good news. **The bad news is that the whole creation groans under the weight of meaninglessness.** Ro. 8:20. But here is the amazing testimony of the Bible – GOD is the one who has subjected the world to meaninglessness! I know we're jumping ahead because we haven't even established the existence of God yet but we'll get there next week. If there is a God why would He subject the world to meaninglessness? There is a simple answer - so that we would never mistake this planet for home. We are not settlers. We are pilgrims just passing through. The bad news is life is hard. The good news is it is only temporary. God has something better for us. C. S. Lewis said,

**“The settled happiness and security which we all desire, God withholds from us by the very nature of the world...It is not hard to see why. The security we crave would teach us to rest our hearts in this world and oppose any obstacles to our return to God...Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home.”** C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

**The good news is that God has planned a glorious future.** The pain we experience in this life is not to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed...v. 18. Paul mentions several things we have to look forward to.

**The Glory of Heaven.** Heaven is a glorious place (v. 18). The word is “Kabod.” It means “heavy.” Heaven is glorious because God is there. One of the greatest promises of all is found in Jn. 14 where Jesus tells His disciples that “I am going to prepare a place for you...I will come again to take you with me so that where I am you may be also.”

**Satisfaction for our longing hearts.** Heaven is a revealing (apokalupsis) place (v. 19). We will find the answers to all of our questions. **“The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.”** C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*. The satisfaction of our deepest desires as well as the answers to all our unanswered questions are revealed in heaven.

**Freedom from futility.** We will be free from the corruption and the futility of this life (v. 21). Even our bodies will be free of disease and dysfunction (v. 23). We will be all that we were designed to be. Our relationship with God will be fully restored. **“In the garden of Eden life was as it was meant to be. The story is important because whatever it was they were, and whatever it was they had, we also were meant to be and to have. The intimacy they knew with God, we are created to know with him. It is our**

**deepest need, as human beings, to learn to live intimately with God. That is what we were made for." John Eldredge (loosely paraphrased)**

Spoiler alert – the purpose of life all comes down to a relationship with Jesus Christ. Future glory and revelation and freedom are possible because God sent His son, Jesus, into time and space and was subjected to futility and injustice and even death in order to set us free from a meaningless existence. The purpose of man is to know Him and make Him known.

I know why I have that train set in my car. One day I realized that it wasn't the train that I was longing for, it was the relationship with my father who gave me that first train. My dad was more excited about it than I was. He was not a handyman but we went to the lumber yard and picked out a flat piece of plywood and painted it and set the track up on it and we did it together. I was participating in a joint project with my dad. Next week I want to talk about your dad. Not your flawed, imperfect, biological progenitor, but your perfect, loving Heavenly Father.

I want to close with a reminder to you that a God of purpose created you on purpose for purpose. Let's invite someone to consider these things.