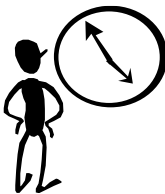


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### Time of Assembly



#### **Sunday:**

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.  
Worship 10:00 a.m.

#### **Every other Sunday night:**

Worship 5:00 p.m.

#### **Wednesday:**

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

## What is Your Purpose?

By Jefferson David Tant

### **Do you ever wonder: What is my purpose?**

Something remarkable happened in Fremont, California. Karen Cheng, age 17, received a perfect 1,000 on both sections of the S.A.T., and a perfect 8,000 on the tough University of California acceptance index. This had never happened before. She was a straight-A student, and claimed to be a typical teenager who eats junk food, talks on the phone for hours, and is a procrastinator — putting off homework until the last minute. (Perhaps there is hope for the rest of us.)

Her teachers describe her as “Wonder Woman” for her thirst for knowledge and the great ability to retain what she reads. She will likely succeed in her chosen field of law.

But there is something else about this remarkable young woman. A reporter interviewed her & asked a poignant question: “What is the meaning of life?” She replied, “I have no idea. I would like to know myself?”

This is characteristic of her generation — an inability to explain why she exists or the purpose in living. Millions of young people (and older ones) who have grown up in America’s affluence have no concept of transcendent values. With more material blessings than any generation in history, they have not been informed concerning who they are, what they have been placed here to do, or what relationship, if any, they are to have with their Creator. Frances Shaeffer commented: “The damnation of this generation is that it doesn’t know why it has meaning.”

Here’s an oft-asked question. If you have ever eaten out with me at a restaurant, you may have heard me ask the server, “May I ask you a philosophical question? What is the meaning of life?” Sometimes I get the “deer in the headlights” look, as they have no clue. And at times I get, “To be happy.” Is that the ultimate reason and purpose for our existence? Just to be happy? Let’s consider the question of life and its purpose.

## Everything Has a Purpose

Inanimate things have a purpose. Can openers, watches, telephones, fingernail clippers, trucks, etc. I never heard of a manufacturer making something that has no purpose. There are things that I don't know what they are for, but someone does. Some things outlive their purpose and are replaced. I have an old crank telephone and an abacus. Modern technology has replaced them.

Creatures in the animal kingdom have a purpose. Without bees, we would not have honey or flowers. Without horses, cowboys could not do their work. I am not sure what mosquitoes are for, but I guess they have a purpose. Even a porpoise has a purpose.

And even human beings have a purpose in life. The famous atheist, Richard Dawkins doesn't think so. "In the universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, and other people are going to get lucky; and you won't find any rhyme or reason to it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at the bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good." Isn't it strange that surely he would think his can opener has a purpose, but he has no purpose?

## The Bible Deals with Purpose

In looking through the Old Testament, we find many references to purpose and meaning. Even 3,000 years ago wise Solomon stated this principle of purpose. "*For everything there is a season, and a time for very purpose under heaven*" (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Isaiah wrote of a purpose for one who was to be born some 700 years later. "*And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength)*" (Isa. 49:5). Even in the dark days of Judah's captivity, God had a plan and purpose for his people. "*For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope'*" (Jeremiah 29:11).

In looking through the New Testament, we find the word "purpose" is used 36 times. Evidently, the Holy Spirit had some purpose in using the word "purpose" so often. Paul wrote to Philippi, urging them to "*make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose*" (Philippians 2:2).

Paul even came to recognize that God had a purpose for him. "*But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood*" (Galatians 1:15-16).

We see God's ultimate purpose fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 3:8-11, Paul points out that this purpose existed before the world existed. "*To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in*

*accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

## God Has a Purpose

God is not bound by limits of time, and before time even began, God had a purpose.

How important is this purpose? It required the death of Christ. *"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with [me] in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel"* (II Timothy 1:8-10).

The "appearing" of Christ had to do with his virgin birth, his sinless life, his death on the cross, and his triumphant resurrection from the dead. It was required for our own salvation. *"For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life"* (Romans 5:6-10).

## What Is Our Purpose?

Now, if everyone has a purpose, why are we here?

Several years ago a man was arrested in an attempt to go over Niagara Falls in a barrel. Fortunately, the barrel stuck in some rocks about 200 yards before going over. He was rescued by a helicopter that managed to pull him out. There is no law against going over the falls in a barrel, so the park police charged him with an ordinance forbidding "any act which serves no earthly purpose." Ron Bradley commented, "If they ever begin enforcing that, all of us are going to be arrested!"

How many lives are like Shakespeare's Macbeth, who said, "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Consider the words of Scripture as they define our purpose.

- *"For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge"* (II Corinthians 5:4-5). Our purpose on this earth is to prepare for eternal life.
- *"Also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will"* (Ephesians 1:11). We are looking for the inheritance God has prepared for us.
- *"And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you"* (I Thessalonians 4:7). Our purpose

here is to glorify God in a sanctified body, one that reflects his character.

- *“For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps” (1 Peter 2:20-21).* We have been called to follow Christ’s example, even if it means suffering, for the reward is extremely worthwhile.
- *“Not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing” (1 Peter 3:9).* We are called to be a blessing to others.
- *“And He was saying to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Luke 10:2).* We are called to be laborers.

Who will teach people like Karen Cheng? Who will answer the Lord’s prayer? In the last month/year, how many people have you even approached with the gospel?

*“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the [statement,] “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Galatians 5:13-14).* We are called to freedom and service. Do you want to go to heaven? Then you should do what you can to help your neighbor go to heaven. That makes perfect sense. That’s the best way to love my neighbor as myself?

**Question:** How are you and I fulfilling our purpose? Some will be thinking, “Well, I live a good life and strive to avoid sin.” Some have the idea, “Well, I have been baptized and come to church faithfully.” Is that your purpose? Is that all there is to it?

Consider Paul’s statement to the church at Philippi: *“make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose” (Philippians 2:2).* No matter what Paul was doing, or where he was, he had a life of purpose — *“one thing I do.” “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained” (Philippians 3:13-16).*

Is this our attitude — *“one thing I do...”*, or is this just one of many things I do? Yes, we all have different responsibilities — work, family, friends, recreation, religion, Did Paul have other responsibilities? We know nothing of a family, except for a sister and a nephew, but we do know at times he had to labor to provide for his needs. But I cannot image anything standing in the way of his *“one thing I do...”* Paul didn’t major in minors, nor have as his motto, “the many things I dabble in.”

Even hard times did not move Paul away from his goal. *“Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so*

*that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter [do it] out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice”* (Philippians 1:12-18). I guess you could say Paul sought and found happiness — joy in the Lord.

Good people, we must keep our eyes on the goal and fulfill our purpose in this world. Paul prayed that we might have an understanding of this. *“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might”* (Ephesians 1:18-19).

That’s what a race is all about. *“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Both Solomon and Jesus in a few words summarized the whole matter. *“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

*“Do not be anxious then, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘With what shall we clothe ourselves?’ For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you”* (Matthew 6:31-33).

## Conclusion

Are you in the race to win, or are you just strolling along? *“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win”* (I Corinthians 9:24).

What is our purpose? To win the crown. Question: How are you and I fulfilling our purpose? Are you even in the race? The requirements to enter the race are quite simple and easy to understand.

*“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned”* (Mark 16:16).

*“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ”* (Galatians 3:27).

*“And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name”* (Acts 22:16).