Sunday, February 6, 1994
WHY DID GOD CREATE ME? (No. 1 in a Series: Living a God Directed Life)
Ephesians 2:8-10

What does it mean to live a "God-directed life?" How do you find God's direction for your life? Another way to ask these questions is: what does it mean to live a life of true purpose, the purpose for which God created you? How do you discover that true purpose and continue to live according to that purpose? These are the basic questions I'll be dealing with in this sermon series, which begins today.

Let's begin by admitting that every human being is driven or directed by something, by some purpose. Some people are driven by guilt. Some people are driven by fear. Some people are driven by resentment, anger, or greed. Some people are driven by their past, and they let it control the future. They say, "I've always been this way. I'm stuck." Some people are driven by their parents; even thirty-five years later, they're still trying to please mom and dad. Some people are driven by peer pressure. Their number one question is, "What will other people think?" Their purpose is to fulfill other people's expectations. Some people are driven by their partner — they're married to a domineering spouse. Think about it: What is your purpose? What drives you the most?

This sermon series is based on the premise that the life that really matters is directed first and foremost by God. That's what this sermon series is all about — finding God's direction for your life and following that direction. It's also based on the premise, as taught by Jesus, that God has a purpose for your life. God does not create things without a purpose.

The tragedy is that many people go through their entire lives without learning what God's purpose is. Some wander aimlessly, and others follow a false purpose or direction and never experience the joy and fulfillment of a "God-directed life."

One way to think about your life is this: you are probably living your life on one of three levels.

Some people live their lives on the survival level. They trudge about aimlessly. They have no joy in their living, no direction. They put in their time, often complaining, and wait for the weekend or their next day off — and that too has little meaning. If I were to ask you what your number one goal in life is and you answered that it was to escape to a desert island, lay on the beach, and soak up the sun's rays, you're living on the survival level. No doubt all of us feel like that at times, but I believe that most of us want to do more with our lives than simply exist, survive, or lay in the sun.

The next level is a little bit higher. We can call it the success level. That's where most people in our culture are today — living on the success level. Look at yourself for a moment. By the world's standards, you've made it. You have a comfortable lifestyle, a nice home in which to live, enough food so that you are never hungry. You have one or two or maybe even three cars. You eat out now and then. You go to the movies, you have some wonderful friends. Overall, life is pretty good. Most of the people in the world would love to have your problems.

But more and more, I hear people in this category ask, "If I'm so successful, why don't I feel more fulfilled?" Or they say in one way or another, "Even though I'm successful, there's an emptiness in my life, something is missing."

Some of the best-selling books on the market today illustrate this emptiness. Many of them have to do with the dark side of success. Consider these book titles: Ambitious Men: Their Drives, Their Dreams, Their Delusions, The Price of Success: Is It Worth It? Beyond Success, The Search for Meaning, Downshifting: Reinventing Success on a Slower Track, If I'm So Successful, Why Do I Feel Like a Fake? Upward Mobility: How to Succeed in Business Without Losing Your Soul, Is It Success or Is It Addiction? These books are all saying the same thing: ultimately, success does not satisfy.

God is not opposed to success that comes to you in an honest way, but God wants you to go beyond success to the third level of living. That's where we're going in this sermon series during the next few weeks — beyond survival and beyond success to significance, to the discovery of living a life of purpose directed by God.

Isn't it true that deep down, all of us want the feeling that our life matters, that our life has meaning, that we count, that we're not just taking up space on the planet Earth, and that there's a meaning and purpose to our life that's more than success or survival? Jesus taught that the way to find true purpose is to discover God's plan for your life and live according to that plan.

The fact is that many successful people feel insignificant. On the other hand, when you look at people who have made the greatest impact on this world, they were not necessarily the brightest, the wealthiest, or even the best educated. People who have made the biggest difference in life, for good or for bad, are those who have had the deepest conviction, whether it was Jefferson or Jesus or Mao or Buddha or Marx or Stalin or Hitler. Unfortunately, some of these people's convictions led to evil rather than good because they were not God-directed. To truly fulfill your potential, you need to discover God's direction for your life and then live it that way.

The Bible is filled with examples of women and men who lived God-directed lives. The Bible tells us that David in the Old Testament served God's purpose in his generation. That's what I want people to be able to say about me, and that's what I want people to be able to say about you. What a wonderful epitaph to have on your tombstone: You served God's purpose in your generation.

Or take Mary, the mother of Jesus in the New Testament. She served God's purpose in her life. Another individual in the New Testament who served God's purpose is the Apostle Paul. Once he met Jesus, he was driven by God's purpose in his life. Thus he could say with joy and satisfaction as he neared the end of his life, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

In future sermons in this series, we are going to help you discover or recover your life's mission. We're going to be looking at these questions: Why did God create you? What is God's direction for your life? How can you discover that direction and keep following it?

Hopefully, once this sermon series is completed, you will have a good idea of your life's plan as directed by God. It's amazing to me that many people who are in business will work for weeks and months on developing a business plan but never consider a personal plan for their lives beyond survival or being successful in worldly terms.

The basic purpose of this first sermon in this series is to introduce the overall theme. We'll get into the specific steps for discovering God's direction and purpose for your life in the coming weeks.

For the rest of this sermon, let's consider what some of the benefits are from living a life of purpose directed by God. Here are the main ones. Perhaps you'll think of others.

The first benefit is this: living a life of purpose directed by God will reduce your frustration. Have you noticed that the level of frustration in America seems to be increasing? People tend to be less patient, more unkind, more prone to outbursts of anger, and less civil to one another. One of the reasons there is more frustration in life today is that we live more and more in a world of multiple choices. We live in a world of incredible options, and that makes decision-making more difficult and more frustrating. I can go home and, if I have cable television, I have a choice of 40 or 50 or more channels depending on the kind of cable service I have, and even with this many choices, it is sometimes difficult to find something worth watching. And now we are told that one day soon we may have up to 500 channels from which to choose.

You can go into a grocery store, and there are more than 100 kinds of cereal from which to choose. Every week, there are more than 100 new grocery items introduced into the market. Every year, more than 200 new magazines are introduced into the market.

Even choosing a soft drink involves all kinds of choices. Take Coca-Cola as an example. When I was growing up, there was one kind of Coca-Cola, and it all came in the same-shaped bottle, easily recognizable. Now, if I order a "coke," I'm asked, "Do you want a diet coke, a cherry coke, a caffeine-free coke, or cherry coke that's caffeine-free or diet cherry coke?" There used to be only two options: take it or leave it.

There was a foreign exchange student who came to the United States, and he didn't know English, so his teacher said, "You've got to eat, so you can go into any restaurant and say, 'hamburger, fries, and coke.'" He thought he could remember that: hamburger, fries, and coke. So for three months, he went into restaurants, and that was all he ate. He was getting a little tired of it, so he came back to his teacher and said, "You've got to help me learn how to order something else to eat, especially for breakfast." "Okay," said his teacher, "You go into a restaurant and you say, 'eggs, toast, and juice.'"

So the next day, he goes into a restaurant, and the waitress asked for his order, and he said he would like to have eggs, toast, and juice. She asked, "Do you want scrambled eggs, fried eggs, poached eggs, boiled eggs, and if boiled, do you want them hard-boiled or soft, or do you want eggs benedict? Do you want whole wheat toast, rye toast, white toast, or bran muffins? Would you like orange juice, grapefruit juice, tomato juice, or prune juice?" He said, "hamburger, coke, and fries." Decision-making can be difficult when there are so many choices, especially so if you lack a sense of direction or focus in your living. As someone said, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there."

Trying to live your life without knowing why God created you is like driving in a fog.

The second benefit that comes from living a God-directed life is that it will increase your motivation. Once you know why God created you, you have a reason to live. Victor Frankl wrote, "The person who has a 'why' to live for can bear with any 'how.'"

You will be amazed at the amount of energy you have once you discover God's purpose for your life. Then you have a reason each morning to get out of bed and can truly say, "This is the day God has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Without a purpose, people get up and say, "Good Lord, it's morning again."

You will have a new step, a new bounce in your walk. Many people rarely think beyond the weekend or beyond the next paycheck. When you have no purpose, you have no motivation. What is the secret to energy, enthusiasm, and hope in life? The secret is to live a purpose-driven life directed by God.

Another benefit from living a purpose-driven life directed by God is that you will find concentration easier because your life will have a focus. None of us has time for everything in life, and without focus, we have no basis upon which to make good choices. God doesn't expect you to do everything in life. More than that, there are only a few things worth doing in the first place. Therefore, you need to concentrate your energy on what God wants you to do, not on everything that others want you to do.

Take the world of business as an example. Someone once asked Peter Drucker, "What's the most basic thing each business owner needs to know?" He said, "There are only two questions to business that every owner needs to know. Number one is, what is my business? And number two is, how's business?" As a minister, I need to be asking those questions all the time. What's the business of the church, and how's business? Every individual needs to ask those two questions of his or her own life: What did God put me here for, and how am I doing?

Knowing your life's business gives you incredible focus and concentration. To say it another way, there is incredible power when you focus your life.

It's the same with light. Light diffused has little power, but when it is focused, it has immense power. As a youngster, I used to take a magnifying glass and focus the sun's rays on a piece of paper or a dry leaf, and by doing so, I could cause it to burn. When your life or mine is diffused, it loses much of its power. Part of the purpose of this sermon series will be to explain how you can better focus your life, and then if that focused life is "God-directed," the power is amazing. Isn't it true that many of our lives are pulled in too many different directions? And the problem is not that some are good and some are evil necessarily, but our lives are filled with too many good things, and we go in too many different directions. Furthermore, many of us are quite efficient in all the things we do. But are we effective? It has been said that to be efficient is to be able to do many things right, but to be effective is to do the right things.

Too many people today are playing trivial pursuit with their lives. When you know your purpose in life, then you are able to take advantage of many opportunities that are right for you, and you are able to say no to those which are not right for you.

The fourth benefit of having a purpose-driven life directed by God is that it will attract cooperation. Once you figure out God's direction for your life, other people want to go along. So few people know what to do with their lives that when they see someone who does, they say, "Hey, that's the right direction," and they want to go along. When you know what your purpose is, people want to get on board. The Bible says in the book of Proverbs, "If your goals are good, you will be respected."

The greatest way you can help other people is to be what God made you to be, and it's the only way to be truly happy. If you as a leader are not living up to your potential, then the people

you work with are being cheated. If you as a father or mother are not living up to your potential, then your children are being cheated.

Here's how you can begin to live a God-directed life. First, believe that God created you for a purpose. In some of the following sermons in this series, I'll be giving you some suggestions as to how to discover that specific purpose for your life, and how to keep following that purpose and direction. However, as Christians, we already know that God's overall purpose for us is to live a life of loving one another so that the love of God and neighbor will be increased in this world. Remember, each one of us is a part of God's loving energy. God created you, therefore, to live a life of love, and there are many ways you can do this — many vocations, and many avocations. You need to discover which ones are right for you because you bring glory to God when you are what God meant you to be, and you find your ultimate joy in life at the same time. Amen.