

Why We Have Chosen Not to Be Involved in the 40 Days of Purpose Program

By Dave Redick
Hwy 20 Church of Christ
Sweet Home, OR

(The following is a manuscript of a presentation addressed to the members of our congregation in April, 2004. Please note that all Scripture quotes are from the New American Standard Version unless noted otherwise. – DR)

You may be aware that a number of churches today of various denominations are participating in a simulcast program called *Forty Days of Purpose*, based on a book called, *The Purpose Driven Life*. I have a copy of the book here. The seminar and the book are the product of a Southern Baptist preacher named Rick Warren who leads the mega-sized Saddleback Community Church in Southern California. Mr. Warren has two best-selling books: *The Purpose Driven Life* and another, earlier one called *The Purpose Driven Church*.

I first became aware of Rick Warren, a disciple of Robert Schuller, some years ago when his marketing philosophy of church growth, described in the first book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, began to be presented and adopted, first by Protestant, evangelical churches, and then by some churches of Christ and Christian Churches within our fellowship. While my intention here is not to review Rick Warren's book on church growth, I will say that though it does introduce some helpful suggestions for relating to unbelievers that churches could use, in my opinion and in the opinion of others, the market driven philosophy behind it has caused churches to take some serious, wrong turns.

Again, my intention here is not to review Rick Warren's book on church growth. It is rather to give a short overview of the *Purpose Driven Life* book that is behind the *Forty Days of Purpose* program that is so popular in our community at the moment. It is also to let you know why we have decided that we should *not* participate in it as a church. It is our responsibility to oversee what is taught here as those who will give an account to God. None of us, after reviewing Rick Warren's book and the introductory simulcast for the program, is comfortable with recommending it or endorsing it with our participation.

Having said these things, let me also say that I am aware that some churches of Christ in our area are participating in this program. Since we believe that the church is supposed to be autonomous, that is, self-governing, we are not suggesting that we should determine what the leaders in those churches decide to do in their own congregations. God will be their judge, just as He will be ours. We don't want His position. Neither do we believe we should have it. Ours (and theirs) is to fear God and keep His commandments.¹ So I speak only for the church here and only because of the numerous requests we have had to explain why we haven't lined up as others have to participate in this program. It is also to answer the occasional misguided criticism we have taken for the same.

I am aware that a few of our members here are participating in this program with friends in other churches. I want you to know that my intent is not to ostracize or criticize them or single them out. It is not our practice to follow our brethren around and micro-manage their lives. Do we believe that a discerning Christian could take this program, sort out the good from the bad, and not be negatively affected? We can only hope so, as there seem to be some intent on doing just that. For us though, the jury is still out. We just hope that such discerning Christians will hear us out and give what we say a reasonable consideration.

With these things said, if after I have laid out our concerns, you conclude that I have spoken in error, I invite you to bring your Bible (appeals based on feelings will have little effect on changing my mind) and come see me at the first

¹ Ecclesiastes 12:13

possible opportunity and point out my wrong in love. I desire to speak the truth to you in love. I don't wish to hinder the cause of Christ.

Speaking of discernment when it came to sorting out prophetic utterances of the Spirit that came from all kinds of sources, Paul told the Thessalonian church in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 that we should *"examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good."* Jesus warned His followers in Matthew 7:15 to *"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."* Also in the context of false teaching, he warns us in Matthew 15:14, *"If a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit."*

Our teaching and that teaching which we endorse and accept needs to be constantly scrutinized against the standard of the Word of God. Anyone who would suggest otherwise is either misguided or misleading.

The Apostle John wrote in 2 John 8-11, when he said, *"Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds."*

I am reading these passages to you so that you may understand in general that God intends for us to be cautious in what we accept. Someone who would fault us for taking a closer look at things like this either does not understand the Scripture or is not willing to heed its teaching.

I see at least five serious problems with Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life* that give me cause for concern. The first and most serious is:

1. An Incomplete Explanation of Salvation.

The question, "What must I do to be saved?" is perhaps the most important query that a person could ever make. It is asked and answered several times in the Bible² so we know it is a valid question. When we ask this question of Rick Warren's book, we come down to page 58 where we read his answer. The following is an exact quote. All emphasized words are his:

"Real life begins by committing yourself completely to Jesus Christ. If you are not sure you have done this, all you need to do is believe and receive. The Bible promises, 'To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.' Will you accept God's offer?"

"First, believe. Believe God loves you and made you for his purposes. Believe you're not an accident. Believe you were made to last forever. Believe God has chosen you to have a relationship with Jesus, who died on the cross for you. Believe that no matter what you've done, God wants to forgive you.

"Second, receive. Receive Jesus into your life as your Lord and Savior. Receive his forgiveness for your sins. Receive his Spirit, who will give you power to fulfill your life purpose. The Bible says, 'Whoever accepts and trusts the Son gets in on everything, life complete and forever.' Wherever you are reading this, I invite you to bow your head and quietly whisper the prayer that will change your eternity: 'Jesus, I believe in you and I receive you.' Go ahead.

"If you sincerely meant that prayer, congratulations! Welcome to the family of God! You are now ready to discover and start living God's purpose for your life...."

² Acts 2:37; Acts 16:30

To someone who knows little or nothing of the scripture, that all sounds pretty good. And it does line up with what many teach. But it isn't the gospel. It isn't what the Bible says one needs to do to be saved. It isn't what puts us into the family of God. While "believing and receiving" are valid concepts, not a single passage under the New Testament ever says that a non-Christian can receive Christ through a prayer. While a person may surely pray a sincere prayer, the Bible nowhere indicates that such a prayer will add him or her to the family of God as Mr. Warren teaches the readers of his book.

The Jews on Pentecost in Acts 2, when they asked what they needed to do since they had crucified the Messiah 50 days previous, were not told to "believe and receive." They were told to *repent and be baptized*. Their question, after being convicted of their sin to such an extent that they interrupted Peter's sermon was, "*Brethren, what shall we do?*" Peter said, "*Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*"³ He went on to say in verse 39, "*For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.*" Surely this later verse indicates that this would include people living today, since God is still calling people to Himself. Peter was an inspired Apostle of Christ. Rick Warren is not. That's why I'm concerned about what he wrote in his book on page 58.

When Jesus spoke to His eleven disciples in Mark 16 after His resurrection and before His ascension, He explained to them the gospel that they were supposed to preach. He didn't tell them to preach "*believe and receive.*" He told them to go into the entire world and preach, "*He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.*"⁴

When God sent fellow Jew Ananias who was a Christian to Saul of Tarsus who had met Jesus on the road to Damascus, after the persecutor's three day fast, Ananias didn't tell Saul, "all you need to do is believe and receive." He said, "*arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name.*"⁵

There is no mention of repentance in Rick Warren's instructions on page 58 for becoming a part of God's family. There is no mention of baptism. In fact, there is no mention of the serious nature of a person's sinful condition outside of Christ. The forgiveness of sins is briefly mentioned but not explained or emphasized, though it is the critical need of every person on earth. The Bible doesn't say that Jesus died so that we could find our purpose in life or discover personal fulfillment here on earth. That might be a by-product of being saved from our sins, but that isn't the real issue that needs to be settled. The Bible says that Jesus died that awful death on the cross to take away our sins⁶ so that we can live forever with Him instead of going to hell to burn forever. If we're going to respond to His offer, we must first understand that we are condemned because our sins separate us from God. We must be told that we need to repent of those sins and be baptized in order for them to be forgiven.

It is true that Warren talks about baptism later in his book, particularly on page 120 and 121 where he says that being baptized is "important" and that it should not be delayed. This sounds good at first reading. In fact, in the first simulcast in the *Forty Days of Purpose* program, a whole section of the video is dedicated to footage of people being immersed. What could be wrong with that? The discerning reader who knows his or her Bible will notice that he never says it has anything to do with forgiveness of sins or salvation. In fact, he believes that it does not. Instead, he explains that it is an outward sign of something that has already taken place inside a Christian. In essence, Warren baptizes people who are told that they are already Christians. In his own words on page 120 of his book, he writes, "Baptism doesn't *make* you a member of God's family; only faith in Christ does that. Baptism *shows* you are part of God's family." Does Mr. Warren give any verses for that statement? No. Instead he compares baptism to a wedding ring which is a visible reminder of an inward commitment. It's a touching analogy, it isn't found in Scripture.

³ Acts 2:38

⁴ Mark 16:15-16

⁵ Acts 22:16

⁶ 1 Peter 3:18

We read of something different in the New Testament.

- Romans 6:23 and Galatians 3:27 tell us that we are “*baptized into Christ.*” These verses don’t say that we are baptized because we are already in Christ.
- 1 Peter 3:21 tells us in clear terms that “*baptism now saves you.*” It doesn’t say that baptism now testifies to the world that you are already saved.
- Acts 2:38 says that baptism is “*for the remission of your sins.*” It doesn’t say that it is done because your sins have already been remitted.
- Acts 22:16 tells us that baptism washes away sin. It doesn’t tell us that baptism is an outward testimony that our sin has already been washed away.
- Romans 6:4 says that we are buried with Christ through baptism, *then* raised to walk in new life. It doesn’t say that we are raised to walk in new life and then are buried in baptism. You bury a dead person, not a live person.
- Jesus said in Mark 16:16, “*He who believes and is baptized shall be saved.*” Rick Warren says, in essence, “He who believes and is saved, should (though it isn’t necessary) be baptized.”
- 1 Peter 3:21 says that baptism is “*an appeal to God for a good conscience.*” Rick Warren believes that baptism is the outward statement to the world that you already have a good conscience.

It has been conveyed to me that some of those I have known and respected have suggested that holding to these things means that we are being too “picky.” In response to that I will simply say that the devil changed only one little three letter word of what God had said while Adam and Eve were still in the garden. God said about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “*On the day you eat from it, you shall surely die.*” Satan said, “*You surely shall not die.*” That little letter word cost Adam and Eve and all who followed after them their lives and their relationship with God. I don’t believe it is “picky” to insist that the scripture not be changed.

Rick Warren’s description of what one must do to become a part of God’s family does not match the Scripture’s teaching. Since we cannot endorse such erroneous teaching without ourselves becoming responsible,⁷ we cannot endorse his book or his seminar.

But I was recently asked whether I ever use or have used any books in my personal library which contain such teaching, and the answer is, “Yes, I do and I have.” I have a number of such volumes including both of Rick Warren’s books. But I don’t endorse them. Neither do I encourage others to study them in a forty day concentrated fashion. Nor do I line up their authors to broadcast simulcast seminars for the church. Nor do I make promises that they will change your life. If I were to hand one of them to someone I considered to be a discerning Christian, it would be done cautiously, with a strong disclaimer. I wouldn’t loan them out indiscriminately.

Having said these things, I have been told that some churches are instructing those who take this course that Rick Warren’s teaching for becoming a Christian is inadequate and should not be heeded. That is good to hear. However, anyone who has ever heard this man’s presentations knows that he is a very persuasive and disarming speaker. I’m not sure that everyone, even under a careful disclaimer, will decipher truth from error – especially newer Christians, those who don’t study their Bibles, or unbelievers who are under the spell of the marketing strategy that is behind this program.

⁷ 2 John 1:9-11

Let me ask again, could a discerning believer use *The Purpose Driven Life* book or seminar to some profit if he or she were very careful? I'd like to believe that, but frankly for me, the jury is still out. I will wait to see what happens with those who do.

Surely if such a person intends to participate, he or she will thank anyone who points out areas of concern. That is what I am endeavoring to do here.

A second serious problem with Rick Warren's book is what I would call:

2. A fast and loose employment of the Scripture.

According to page 325 of Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life* "contains nearly a thousand quotations from Scripture." These come from various translations and paraphrases of the Bible. Some good points are made. For instance, beginning on page 130 and following, the believer is encouraged to identify with the local church and is prompted to find a place and means of service to God – things that many preachers, this one included, have told Christians they need to do for many years. My concern here is not with these things. What I am concerned about is the loose and sloppy way Rick Warren uses Scripture.

In order to support the points of his book he uses fifteen different translations and paraphrases. A paraphrase, of course, is not a translation. Rather, it is the paraphraser's comments on what he thinks the Bible means. A paraphrase is man's word, not God's word. He also has placed the footnotes for these translations and paraphrases (the verse limitations and version he is quoting) in the back of his book rather than in the text, making it very difficult for the reader to check them for accuracy or context. I would guess that most people never attempt to verify what he claims the Bible says or the context. In fact, the several people to whom I have pointed these things out admitted to me that they didn't take the extra time necessary to look up the verses or their context. They just assumed they were used correctly. I understand why. It's a lot of work! As I went through the book, I *did* look them up. When I viewed a tape of the first simulcast that was loaned to me, I looked up every passage cited. The back of the book placement of the references probably tripled the time it would have normally taken to complete the book or the tape.

More serious than the placement of his footnotes though, is that in using so many versions, it appears not that Mr. Warren has gone to the Bible to find his points, but rather he has found his points and then shopped around among these various versions in order to find bits and phrases that seem to support his points. I say "seem to support his points" because too often verses are taken completely out of their native context and plugged in to a totally different context to make the author's point. Further, he often quotes only the portion of the verse or verses that seems to support his point, sometimes leaving out a part of the verse that contradicts or nullifies his point. Because of this sloppy practice (Realize that I'm being gracious here in calling it "sloppy." I didn't say "devious" because I don't know his motives) I would ask this: Doesn't Rick Warren trust God's word to say what God means without his needing to shop translations and paraphrases for bits and pieces of verses that seem to support his points? I would also ask this: Does not taking verses out of context distort and change the meaning of God's word? Surely with his theological training, he is aware that it does.

Rick Warren justifies this fragmentary use of the Scripture by saying this on page 325: "I haven't always quoted the *entire* verse, but rather focused on the phrase that was appropriate. My model for this is Jesus and how he and the apostles quoted the Old Testament. They often just quoted a phrase to make a point."

If Mr. Warren quoted these verse fragments consistently with their context, I would not object. But too often he does not. And if he would say that this is the way that Jesus and the apostles did it, I would counter that Rick Warren isn't Jesus. Nor is he Peter, Paul, Matthew, or John. These were inspired men, empowered to write God's word the way He wanted it written – without error. Mr. Warren isn't inspired to do that. Thus he, and all the rest of us living today who

teach, must be very careful not to rip bits and phrases out of their context and distort them for our own use to back up conclusions that are different than the original authors intended.

Let me give you a few examples. Further study will reveal more of these:

On the top of page 22 of his book, Warren has the chapter heading which reads, “You Are Not an Accident.” Then as a supportive verse, he quotes Isaiah 44:2a from the Contemporary English Version: *“I am your Creator. You were in my care even before you were born.”* That sounds good and seems to support his point. The problem is that he uses the verse out of context, as though it applies to the reader his book. However, when you read the rest of the verse you realize that Isaiah is not talking to modern purpose seekers. He is talking to ancient Israel. Here is the whole verse, in its context, from the same Contemporary English Version:

“People of Israel, I have chosen you as my servant. I am your Creator. You were in my care even before you were born. Israel, don't be terrified! You are my chosen servant, my very favorite.” Isaiah 44:1-2 (CEV)

I think we all know that God's chosen people when this was written were the Jews. No one else enjoyed such a wonderful position. Isaiah says, *“You are my chosen servant.”* This could only apply to Israel back then. So in its native context, Isaiah didn't intend this verse to apply to everyone, Jew and Gentile. Nor can we find reason to say that it was intended to apply to us living today. This verse wasn't written to the modern purpose seeker. It wasn't written to non-believers, even in its day. It was written to ancient Israel. But Warren doesn't use it that way. Nor does he tell his readers what the verse really means. He just cuts out the part that fits his point and inserts it where it will serve his purpose.

At the top of page 28, Warren quotes God's words to Cain in Genesis 4:12 from the New International Version, *“You will be a helpless wanderer on the earth,”* as though such wandering is due to a lack of understanding one's purpose in life. “That describes most people today,” he says, “wandering through life without a purpose.” But if you look up the verse, you quickly will see that a lack of purpose wasn't Cain's problem. His wandering was God's punishment for murdering his brother! Even if Cain had taken Rick Warren's *Forty Days of Purpose* seminar, he would still have been a *“helpless wanderer on the earth”* because he was under God's judgment.

In the middle of page 30, Warren makes the statement, “Knowing your purpose gives meaning to life.” I have no problem with that statement except with the way he claims it is supported by the Bible. To show how purposelessness can cause lack of meaning, he quotes Job 7:6 from the Living Bible Paraphrase: *“My life drags by – day after hopeless day.”* This sounds OK until you take the time to read the verse in its context and you learn that Job wasn't bemoaning a lack of purpose. He was lamenting the loss of his health! Here is the verse in the Living Bible Paraphrase in its context:

“My skin is filled with worms and blackness. My flesh breaks open, full of pus. My life drags by-day after hopeless day. My life is but a breath, and nothing good is left. You see me now, but not for long. Soon you'll look upon me dead.” Job 7:5-8 (TLB)

Now let me read that verse in a real translation:

“My flesh is clothed with worms and a crust of dirt; My skin hardens and runs. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and come to an end without hope.” Job 7:5-6 (NASV)

These verses have absolutely nothing to do with finding a purpose driven life. In fact, if you know Job's story, you know that he never came to understand God's full purpose for his suffering. The message from the book of Job is to trust God even when you don't understand His purpose.

In the middle of page 31, Warren writes, “If you have felt hopeless, hold on! Wonderful changes are going to happen in your life as you begin to live it on purpose. God says, *“I know what I am planning for you... ‘I have good plans for*

you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future.’” That sounds pretty good, doesn’t it? The quote is from Jeremiah 29:11 in the New Century Version. However, when you go over to Jeremiah and check out the context, you learn that these words were lifted out of a letter to the exiles of the Babylonian captivity five hundred years before Christ. God was reassuring them that they still had a part in his plan, though they were exiled. Here is what Jeremiah says in 29:1:

“Now these are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the rest of the elders of the exile, the priests, the prophets and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.” Jeremiah 29:1 (NASV)

While we do believe that God is compassionate with His people and has their ultimate good at heart (Romans 8:28) the verse Warren cites does not make the point.

At the top of page 82 of Rick Warren’s book, in speaking of “The blessing of surrender,” he writes, “The Bible is crystal clear about how you benefit when you fully surrender your life to God. First you experience peace...” Then he quotes Job 22:21 from the New Living Translation: *“Stop quarrelling with God! If you agree with him, you will have peace at last, and things will go well with you.”* That sounds like pretty good advice until you go over and read the context and learn that it was spoken by Eliphaz, one of Job’s dubious “friends,” who was working under the false assumption that Job had sinned against God. But Job hadn’t sinned and Eliphaz and Job’s other friends were later rebuked by God for the things they said to Job.⁸

Am I being too picky here? I can imagine someone thinking or saying, “OK. So he’s a little sloppy about his use of Scripture. He hasn’t taught anything that is really wrong in these places, has he? Surely his basic principles are sound.”

Well maybe they are and maybe they aren’t. I’ve already shown you that they aren’t sound when it comes to the issue of salvation. But is it right to claim or imply that “God’s word says” certain things when it really doesn’t? Even assuming that his principles are sound, is he not indirectly introducing the practice of playing fast and loose with the Scripture? If you are schooled for 40 days in how to take Scripture out of context or how to ignore context, will it not affect your ability to understand the Bible after that? When teachers get sloppy with the Bible, those they teach also get sloppy. The old saying is: “A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pew.”

A third problem with *The Purpose Driven Life* book is what we could call:

3. A nearly superstitious use of the time period of 40 Days.

On page 9 Mr. Warren writes,

“The Bible is clear that God considers 40 days a spiritually significant time period. Whenever God wanted to prepare someone for his purposes, he took 40 days....” He then gives eight examples that he says prove his point.

- *Noah’s life was transformed by 40 days of rain.*
- *Moses was transformed by 40 days on Mount Sinai.*
- *The spies were transformed by 40 days in the Promised Land.*
- *David was transformed by Goliath’s 40 day challenge.*
- *Elijah was transformed when God gave him 40 days of strength from a single meal.*
- *The entire city of Nineveh was transformed when God gave the people 40 days to change.*
- *Jesus was empowered by 40 days in the wilderness.*
- *The disciples were transformed by 40 days with Jesus after his resurrection.*

⁸ Job 38:2

While all of these citations have the time period of 40 days in common, they have little or nothing to do with the discovery of purpose.

Was Noah without purpose before he was “transformed by 40 days of rain”? I thought God gave him a purpose. He was to build an ark, a job that took 120 years, and preach to his generation and warn them of the coming flood.⁹ As I recall, God’s explaining that purpose took only a short time, not 40 days.

Did Moses lack purpose before he climbed Mount Sinai for 40 days to receive the Ten Commandments? I thought he had a purpose before that. I thought he was told from a burning bush to go before Pharaoh and demand the release of God’s people.¹⁰ Though it took a chapter and a half in Exodus for God to get His point across to Moses because the patriarch made so many excuses, it didn’t take 40 days. It probably took only part of a day.

Did David lack purpose before he heard the taunts of Goliath? I thought his purpose was tending his father’s sheep, which would prepare him for the later service of shepherding God’s people.

Did any of these mentioned lack purpose before their cited 40 days? It doesn’t seem like it to me.

While there is nothing wrong with spending 40 days on a good cause (say like studying your Bible rather than Rick Warren’s book) nothing miraculous or magic is going to take place just because you spend 40 days doing it. You could spend 39 days or 41 days – or 500 days, for that matter. God doesn’t guarantee to us that there will be something special that happens to us if we do something for 40 days. Actually, God has used other time periods to transform people’s lives than 40 days. For instance, he trained his apostles in 3 years. He took 80 years before he revealed His purpose to Moses through the burning bush. Was Moses just a “*helpless wanderer on the earth*” until that time? He took approximately 27 years to reveal Joseph’s purpose to him¹¹ in preserving his family and the bloodline of the Messiah. How did Joseph survive all those years without knowing his purpose? He simply trusted God even when he didn’t understand. (That is what *faith* is, by the way. Hebrews 11:1 says, “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*”) Joseph was right in the middle of God’s purpose, though he didn’t know it at the time, simply because he was living an obedient life.

The real problem with the 40 day number isn’t that it’s bad to spend 40 days pursuing a worthy goal. If you do that with a truly worthy goal, you’re bound to see results. The problem is that when you use it to hype people and build their expectations that God is somehow supernaturally in the number 40, aside from the fact that you are misleading them, you set them up to blame God if their expectations aren’t met or if they’re not really “fulfilled” at the end of the *Forty Days of Purpose*. If doing it in 40 days somehow guarantees that God is in it, then what are you going to think of God if the program doesn’t deliver what is promised? That leads me to the fourth problem that I see with Rick Warren’s book. It has to do with:

4. Inaccurate and Misleading Statements.

Rick Warren begins his book with a promising chapter called “It All Starts with God.” In the opening statement of the chapter, on page 17, he says, “It’s not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your family, your peace of mind, or even your happiness.” That sounds encouraging, but upon reading the book it surely seems to me that the book is indeed “all about you.”

⁹ Genesis 6:13-22; 2 Peter 2:5

¹⁰ Exodus 3

¹¹ Genesis 50:20

Before it even begins, on the dedication page of the book, just across from the copyright information we read, “This book is dedicated to you.” Then on page 9, under the heading, “Getting the most from this book,” he says,

“By the end of this journey you will know God’s purpose for your life and will understand the big picture – how all the pieces of your life fit together. Having this perspective will reduce your stress, simplify your decisions, increase your satisfaction, and, most important, prepare you for eternity.”

The book is indeed, “All about you.” That’s because in Warren’s market driven world, if you’re going to impress the seeker, you have to spell out the benefits to him in terms of “felt needs,” because that is the only kind of needs the seeker is supposed to know about. So what are some of the other inaccurate and misleading statements?

On page 34 of the book, Rick Warren says that judgment will be reduced to two questions from God. I quote:

“First, ‘What did you do with my Son, Jesus Christ?’ God won’t ask about your religious background or doctrinal views. The only thing that will matter is, did you accept what Jesus did for you and did you learn to love and trust him? Second, ‘What did you do with what I gave you?’ What did you do with your life – all the gifts, talents, opportunities, energy, relationships, and resources God gave you?”

Did you notice that there is no mention of sin in that? Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*” Warren only mentions the good. While one might argue that, because of forgiveness, there will be no mention of the sins of Christians at judgment, Warren does not mention this. And he does not get around to making a distinction between Christians and non-Christians until page 58.

On page 175, Warren says, “While effort has nothing to do with your salvation, it has much to do with your spiritual growth.” Effort has nothing to do with salvation? I thought Paul said in Philippians 2:12 that Christians should “*work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*” I thought Peter said in 2 Peter 1:10, “*be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you....*” While we can never be saved by our works of human merit, effort is very important with regard to our salvation. The house built upon the rock in Jesus’ parable (Matthew 7:24-27) survived because the wise man heard Jesus’ words and *acted* upon them.

On page 193, Mr. Warren states that God “...depends more on circumstances to make us like Jesus than he depends on our reading the Bible.” He bases this on the fact that we face circumstances twenty-four hours a day and, presumably, read the Bible much less time than that. But I say his statement is misleading. We should be *applying* the teaching of the Bible that we have learned 24 hours a day, all the while learning more! If we must wait until our practice matches our knowledge, we’ll never make any headway. Besides, we can know *very little* about God without the Bible. While we cannot argue that circumstances *combined with* practical application of the Bible is an indispensable way to learn, Warren makes it sound like Bible study is unimportant and that all those people who emphasize studying it are in error. Listening to his time/quantity comparison, if one studied the Bible for only one hour a day and dealt with “circumstances” for 24 hours a day, the Bible would be only 1/24th as important as circumstances. Who is going to spend time studying the Bible if he or she can learn by just living? This is misleading.

As is his statement **on page 231** where he says, “The *last* thing many believers need today is to go to another Bible study. They already know far more than they are putting into practice.” I *strongly* disagree with that statement. What I observe is that most of those Warren calls “believers” know precious little about the Bible. And they will know less and less as time goes on if they adopt Warren’s view of Bible study.

And what should believers do if they take Rick Warren’s advice and refrain from going to another Bible study because they already know too much of that stuff compared to their practice? Why, go to a Rick Warren, Purpose Driven Life book study, of course! There are no such “over learning” difficulties with that. **On page 306-307**, Warren admonishes his readers with these words: “The best way to *internalize* the principles in this book is to discuss them with others in a

small-group setting... I *strongly* urge you to gather a small group of friends and form a Purpose-Driven Life Reading Group to review these chapters on a weekly basis. Discuss the implications and the applications of each chapter.” So the *last* thing we need is more Bible study because we know too much for our level of practice, but the *best* thing we can do is form a group and review the chapters of Rick Warren’s book on a weekly basis. What’s wrong with this picture?

On page 210 in *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren writes, “It may surprise you that *nowhere* in the Bible are we told to ‘resist temptation.’ We are told to ‘*resist the devil*,’ but that is *very* different.”

Let me put that into perspective with an analogy. Analyze this statement: “It may surprise you that *nowhere* in the Bible does it say that you men shouldn’t beat your wives. It says you should love them, but that is *very* different.”

You be the judge.

Finally, I see in Rick Warren’s book:

5. An establishment of unrealistic expectations.

In consumer marketing, it’s all about benefits. By that I mean that if you want to sell your product to people who are resistant to the sale, you have to package it so as to present the benefits that your consumer targets will easily relate to in a very short amount of time. If it’s soap for their clothes washer, you don’t talk about how well the product mixes with water or the secret formula you have or the long-term benefit to their clothes. You tell them that with your product their clothes will be “whiter than white” and “brighter than bright,” or that they will smell “spring air fresh” after the first wash. If its bath soap, you tell them it will get them “zestfully clean.” But they must see the benefits to them right away or they’ll pick up some other box of soap for their washer or bar or soap for their body. You must present the benefits as something they can quickly relate to. If you were to tell them that after six months their clothes would finally be clean, they wouldn’t relate. This is a marketing axiom. You must appeal to immediate, “felt needs.” Rick Warren knows it well. On page 12 of his book, he writes, “Because I know the benefits, I want to challenge you to stick with this spiritual journey for the next 40 days, not missing a single daily reading.”

Those familiar with Rick Warren’s writings and seminars know that consumer marketing is the philosophy behind his first book called *The Purpose Driven Church*. True to his convictions, Mr. Warren has brought that philosophy, which does bring in the crowds, right into his *Purpose Driven Life* book. Here is what he says on page 9 of his book, in the chapter called “Getting the Most from This Book”:

“This is more than a book; it is a guide to a *40-day spiritual journey* that will enable you to discover the answer to life’s most important question: What on earth am I here for? By the end of this journey you will know God’s purpose for your life and will understand the big picture – how all the pieces of your life fit together. Having this perspective will reduce your stress, simplify your decisions, increase your satisfaction, and, most important, prepare you for eternity.”

Wow! That sounds pretty good, doesn’t it? No wonder people are attracted to Mr. Warren’s seminar. Who wouldn’t want to “understand the big picture” or know “What on earth am I here for?” If you could know “how all the pieces fit together” in just 40 days, there would be no need for learning and no need for trial and error (and no need for faith!) Those little misguided ventures where you had to learn the hard way would disappear. There would be no need to agonize over making the right decisions because you would already know the right decision. As he says, this would “reduce your stress, simplify your decisions, increase your satisfaction....” And besides all that, at the end of this *40-day spiritual journey*, you would be ready for eternity to boot. Are you sold? A lot of people are.

And if you play the claims of these benefits to non-Christians or to Christians who are struggling in their faith, especially against a backdrop of throngs of seemingly satisfied, smiling people, you find a ready audience. This is the summation of the introductory video in the seminar. It sounds so good, people *want* to be convinced.

But let's turn off the infomercial for just a moment and put on the headgear that is supposed to be used for good old fashioned reasoning. Let's employ the few brain cells that we have left after the Madison Avenue approach has had its way with us and see if we can have an original thought or two for ourselves.

Rick Warren claims that God is the one who gives us purpose in our lives and I agree with that. Also, with his "nearly a thousand quotations from scripture" in his book (though many of them are really paraphrases and bits and snatches taken from here and there out of context) he conveys the idea that God communicates our purpose to us through the Bible. That said then, there ought to be some examples of people in Scripture who have had their stress level reduced, their lives simplified, and their satisfaction increased, right? There ought to be people who have lived this nirvana and have enjoyed these benefits. And surely the ones most likely to have attained these benefits would be the teachers and leaders who taught the principles in the first place, so let's consider the first great leaders of Christianity.

Let's take Paul. He wrote approximately 2/3rds of the New Testament. He was so fully sold out to the purpose of God that he wrote in Galatians 2:20, "*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.*" Paul was so wrapped up in God's purpose that it was like he himself didn't even exist anymore. So he ought to be one of those reduced stress level, simplified life, satisfied guys, right?

Here's a page out of his journal:

"... We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake...."
2 Corinthians 4:8-11

Here's another:

[I have been] "*beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches.*" 2 Corinthians 11:23-28

And that was all *after* he submitted his life to Christ's purpose and quit "*kicking against the goads*"¹² of God's will.

Tell me - if the benefits of discovering God's purpose reduce your stress, simplify your decisions, and increase satisfaction, why didn't the formula work for Paul? Maybe he was on the wrong track. Too bad they didn't have a *Forty Days of Purpose* seminar back then. His life could have had much less stress. He would not have had to worry about decisions. He could have had much more satisfaction. Poor guy.

What about Peter? Now there's a guy who would be dialed in to the purpose of God. Tradition says that when he was executed for his faith, he requested to be crucified upside down so as not to dishonor His Lord. Now that's commitment to God's purpose.

¹² Acts 26:14

But wait a minute. They crucified him? What about that reduced stress, simplified decision, satisfied life thing? I always thought that being crucified was pretty stressful. It surely was for Jesus.

Here are a few notes from Peter's journal:

"Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose [Hey. Look at that. Peter understood the purpose driven life, too! Cool.] because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God."

1 Peter 4:1-2

What was that? Arm yourselves with the same purpose of suffering as Christ? What is he talking about? What about stress relief? I'll say more about this in just a moment. Here are some additional things Peter said:

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God."

1 Peter 4:12-16

More suffering. Peter would not have made a good church growth leader, would he? He's a very poor salesman. He probably would have flunked out of Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Church seminar, if that is possible. You don't attract crowds of purpose seekers by talking about suffering. You have to address their "felt needs." Things like stress relief, simplified decisions, and increased satisfaction. Does anyone know if Peter wrote a "stress relief" epistle? How about a "satisfaction" epistle? If people "can't get no satisfaction," they'll be out the door, Peter!

Had Peter lived today, talking like that, I think he would be preaching in some little dinky congregation that had a very small growth rate. May God have mercy on his poor, backward, outdated, shriveled up soul!

Well then, what about Jesus? Surely He got it right. He couldn't possibly miss God's purpose for His life because He was God! But He didn't lead a stress free, simplified decision, increased satisfaction life either, did He? He *stressed* so much in Gethsemane that He popped the blood capillaries in His forehead. Over what? Over the *decision* to have God take the cup of suffering away from Him. And what about satisfaction? Do you suppose that He was *satisfied* when all of those people He had preached to and taught for 3 years abandoned Him? Was His life a life of reduced stress? Maybe you could make that point for the first 30 years of it, but then He began His ministry. He set out to pursue His life's purpose and all hell lined up against Him. As His ministry went on, the stress only increased. The foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of Man had no place to lay His head.¹³ Have you ever been homeless? Do you think that would produce a little stress?

I'm trying to show you that the things Rick Warren promises in His book are not generally what you get when you connect yourself to God's purpose in your life. No. The fact is, the more you take on God's purpose, the more you will find that this world resists you and sometimes even hates you. But don't act surprised.

Jesus said in Matthew 10:34, "*Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*"

¹³ Luke 8:58

He said in John 15:20, “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”

He said in John 16:33, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

Read Rick Warren’s *Purpose Driven Life* book and he promises that you will know the big picture and that with this perspective you will reduce your stress, simplify your decisions, and increase your satisfaction.

Read the word of Christ and He promises not peace in this world, but a sword, not tranquility but persecution, not a life of ease but tribulation.

So why would anyone with any degree of sense decide to follow Jesus? They’d have to be nuts, right? The answer to that is that not many do really decide to follow Him.¹⁴

Multitudes were following Jesus before He preached His famous “Bread of Life” sermon in John 6. He was on a roll! He fed the people miraculous free meals and they packed the place. It was standing room only.

Then He preached *that* sermon. It was offensive. It called attention to who He really was. And it made people mad. It was ugly. Unless they were willing to eat His flesh and drink His blood, they would have no life in themselves. John reports that, “As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore.”¹⁵ Not content to shut up and cut His losses for the day, He turned to the twelve and said, “You do not want to go away also, do you?”¹⁶ (That violated every modern “church growth” principle in the book! Inviting people to leave rather than change your preaching to suit their “felt needs” and make it more palatable? Horrors!) Simon Peter responded with something profound to this whole purpose driven issue. He said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.”¹⁷

My friends, *that* is the reason we follow Jesus. Not for stress relief. Not for simplicity in making decisions. Not for satisfaction in this life. We do it to obtain eternal life. We put self-gratification on standby here and now for what we can gain later. We look for a day when stress, along with death and every tear in our eye, will be wiped away. We long for a day when we don’t have to wrestle with the decisions of right and wrong because sin will be gone. We dream of a day when we will have eternity to be satisfied that we stuck with Him and His word unto death and now we have the crown of eternal life.

Here are the facts. The majority of people in this world are not interested in eternity. They never will be. In this age there are fewer and fewer of them all the time. They want their goodies now. They won’t risk losing their fun now for something they cannot see until later. That’s why people like Rick Warren have bought and are now selling the idea that if you can’t get these self-absorbed people to come to church, you’re a failure – you’re a nobody.

It takes courage to resist that. But there is one thing that makes it worthwhile and that is the hope of eternal life. If that doesn’t come through, those of us who refuse to be steered away from the Bible and its teaching are going to be the biggest fools that ever lived. But if it does come through, the fools will be the other guys.

I’m not betting on the other guys.

¹⁴ Matthew 7:13-14

¹⁵ John 6:66

¹⁶ John 6:67

¹⁷ John 6:68