

STUDY GUIDE

PLEASANT RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH
NEW YEAR'S
GROWING TO KNOW GOD MORE
1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27; PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11
12/31/2017



MAIN POINT

Our purpose in life is to know God and love Him above all else.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

If we asked a random sample of people in our city, "What is the purpose of life?", what kind of answers do you think we would get? How does Scripture answer that question for us?

People today view their purpose in life in many different ways. Some think they exist to make a name for themselves. Others believe they exist to make the world a better place. Some people even reject the concept of purpose altogether. Scripture, however, paints a different picture of purpose for us. Isaiah 43:7 tells us that God created us for His glory. This tells us that God created us for a relationship with Himself in which we grow to value Him above all things.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27.

Have you ever felt like a boxer beating the air (v. 26)? What things distract you from living your life with purpose?

Living with purpose is not just about having something to do with your life but rather, making the highest and best use of your life. By that definition, what was Paul's purpose in life (vv. 19-23)?

What kept Paul from running aimlessly? What measures can we take to ensure that we are living with a gospel-centered purpose?

Paul clearly saw his "highest and best use" as knowing God and helping others do the same. Paul kept himself focused on the task of knowing God and making God known by disciplining himself. Just as athletes must faithfully and consistently train themselves in order to succeed in their sport, so too must Christians discipline themselves to pursue Christ.

What are some practical ways we might discipline ourselves to pursue Christ? Why is such discipline necessary to living with purpose?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JEREMIAH 9:23-24.

According to the Word of the Lord in verse 23, what are some things that we are tempted to boast in? What sorts of things do you tend to boast about?

How might boasting in these things hinder us from growing in our knowledge of God?

What does God say we should boast in (v. 24)? We tend to think of boasting as distasteful and prideful. How is boasting in God different?

God is the greatest being in the universe. He is holy and glorious beyond compare (1 Sam. 2:2; Rom. 11:33-36), therefore, to boast in Him is neither distasteful nor prideful. We were created to know, love, and value God supremely. When we boast in anything other than God we are refusing to acknowledge and live out the purpose for which we were created.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11.

In verses 4-6, Paul mentions the credentials that he had taken pride in before coming to faith in Christ. How does Paul now describe those credentials (vv. 7-8)?

Why did Paul's view of his spiritual credentials and qualifications change?

Why such single-minded devotion to Christ? Because He is the only source of righteousness—that is, of right relationship with God. Righteousness comes as a gift from God by faith in Christ, the true way to God in contrast to human merit or works. This is Paul's doctrine of salvation and philosophy of life. In regards to eternal salvation, humans deserve nothing, can achieve nothing, and have no reason for pride or self-assurance. God has done everything: created, disciplined, graced, given His Son Jesus on the cross for our sin, raised Him, declared us righteous and justified, adopted us as His children, and promised us resurrection and eternal life. The only human part in all this, in faith, is to accept what God has done.

According to verses 10-11, what was the focus of Paul's life?

What things do you do to get to know Christ better?

Demonstrating the lack of importance of earthly things, Paul expressed what life truly meant to him. He desired resurrection from the dead, so he pursued the only way that promised resurrection. Paul discovered that Judaism with its traditions, regulations, and rituals could not guarantee resurrection. Only the resurrected One could. This changed Paul's aim in life. He wanted to know Christ and the power of His resurrection. To know Christ meant much more than knowing about Him in his mind. Knowledge is a relational term of intimacy. Paul wanted the closest possible personal relationship with Christ.

What does it mean to share in Christ's sufferings? How might desiring to know Christ result in suffering?

Knowing Christ involves a dynamic relationship with Him at a deep level, one that experiences the power of His resurrection—what His power over death means for Christians as they live life now. Scripture also indicates that Christians will experience difficulties and struggles in their lives because they are followers of Christ, and this is what

the fellowship of His sufferings is all about. He suffered for us; we suffer for Him—albeit for an entirely different reason. Believers can enjoy Christ’s resurrection power today in the full assurance that they will experience their own resurrection from the dead at His return. In everyday living, Paul maintained that his life and the lives of his readers should reflect the difference that Christ makes.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How can you determine whether or not you value knowing Jesus as your Lord?

What hurdles keep believers from making every effort to know Christ more and become like Him? Which one is the biggest challenge for you? How can you combat that this week?

Do you view yourself as sharing in Christ’s sufferings? If so, in what specific ways? If not, what might that look like in your life?

PRAY

Thank God for giving us purpose and joy by graciously inviting us into a relationship with Himself. Pray that we would grow to treasure our relationship with Him so deeply that we are willing to suffer for the sake of His Kingdom.

COMMENTARY

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

Paul next turned to an analogy that illustrated the seriousness of this matter. He appealed to the athletic event of a race. Because of the Corinthians’ sponsorship and familiarity with the Isthmian Games, the analogy of a race spoke to an experience that Paul had shared with the Corinthian believers. Paul drew several comparisons between the Christian life and a race.

First, not everyone wins, just as not everyone who begins the Christian life endures to the end. Therefore, everyone who claims to be a Christian must always run to get the prize. Christians must be “eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:14). They will express their faith through good works (Eph. 2:10; Jas. 2:17).

Second, every athlete goes into strict training. Christians must devote themselves to self-denial, such as forfeiting their rights for the sake of weaker brothers and sisters, and to spiritual development and self-discipline.

Third, unlike athletes who work hard to get a crown that will not last, a ceremonial wreath, Christians will receive a crown that will last forever (cf. 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:4). By this latter crown Paul referred to eternal rewards such as everlasting life, not to temporal blessings. Christians endure for eternal glory (Rom. 2:7; 2 Tim. 2:10).

9:26–27. Paul drew some moral implications for his life from the foregoing analogy. First, he did not live his Christian life like a man running aimlessly. He had a definite goal—winning the prize—and he ran to achieve it.

Second, shifting the analogy slightly, Paul commented that he did not fight like a man beating the air. Later, in a letter to Timothy, Paul again metaphorically wrote of running and boxing for the purpose of gaining a crown (2 Tim. 4:7–8). Here, he pointed out his care not to miss with his “spiritual punches.”

Third, he declared his determination to beat his body (literally, to give himself a “black eye”). Paul did not mean that he actually afflicted or beat his body. He was speaking metaphorically. When boxers fight vigorously, they usually end up with bruises. Paul probably meant that he followed Christ so vigorously that it sometimes caused him physical harm, such as being lashed, beaten with rods, stoned, and shipwrecked (2 Cor. 11:24–25).

Fourth, he made his body his slave. This is a metaphor describing the rigor of his spiritual life. He conditioned himself spiritually, denying himself as athletes deny themselves for the sake of winning the contest (cf. Titus 2:12).

Paul concluded this athletic analogy by restating his goal. He worked hard to make sure that after he had preached to others, he would not be disqualified for the prize. Again, Paul did not speak of losing salvation. Yet, he was aware that even he could fall away from Christ and prove he had never truly been regenerated. Paul knew that the prize is received only by those who endure to the end.

In this analogy the apostle spoke generally about his entire spiritual life. He lived like an athlete in every area of his life. In the context of this chapter, however, the more immediate reference is the way Paul gave up his rights for the sake of others. Self-denial in service to others is a difficult practice. Yet, Paul knew that it was necessary if he wanted to attain the prize of eternal life. By implication, the same is true of every believer, just as it was true of the knowledgeable ones in the Corinthian church. Paul used himself as an example for them to follow. Since he, an apostle, had been willing to make such sacrifices, the Corinthians should be willing as well. (Richard L. Pratt Jr, I & II Corinthians, vol. 7, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 152–153.)

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11

3:7. While these credentials and accomplishments are impressive, Paul placed no “stock” or confidence in them. Jewish observers would place him at the top of the religious elite. He placed it all in the debit or loss column. Why? Nothing belonged in the profit column except Christ. His relationship with Christ is far superior to his Jewish background.

3:8. Paul emphasizes his point by restating it. The things of the world—all human accomplishments—are viewed as rubbish or garbage in comparison to gaining Christ. Paul’s focus changed completely. No longer did personal religious ritual and obedient religious acts occupy center stage. All eyes were on Christ and on him alone. Paul wanted to know Christ.

3:9. Why such single-minded devotion to Christ? Because he is the only source of righteousness—that is, of right relationship with God. Righteousness comes as a gift from God and is by faith in Christ, the true way to God in contrast to human merit or works. Here is Paul’s doctrine of salvation and philosophy of life. In regards to eternal salvation, humans deserve nothing, can achieve nothing, and have no reason for pride or self-assurance. God has done everything: created, disciplined, had grace, given his Son Jesus on the cross for our sin, raised Jesus, declared us righteous and justified, adopted us as his children, and promised us resurrection and eternal life. The only human part in all this, in faith, is to accept what God has done.

3:10–11. Demonstrating the lack of importance of earthly things, Paul expressed what life truly meant to him. He desired resurrection from the dead, so he sought the way that promised resurrection. The Damascus road experience transformed him. He discovered that Judaism with its traditions, regulations, and rituals could not guarantee resurrection. Only the resurrected One could. This changed Paul’s aim in life. He wanted to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. To know Christ meant much more than knowing about him in his mind.

Knowledge is a relationship term of intimacy. Paul wanted the closest possible personal relationship with Christ, a relationship pictured in baptism as buried to the old life of sin and raised to a new life of righteousness. To know Christ in this way meant he was ready to share in Christ’s sufferings, even if that meant sharing his death. Paul’s longing to share with Christ comes through strongly in Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” In everyday living, Paul maintained that his life and the lives of his readers should reflect the difference that Christ makes. (Max Anders, Galatians-Colossians, vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 243–244.)

Jeremiah 9:23-24

9:23–24 The theme changes from indictments of sin and descriptions of judgment to an exhortation to seek what is truly worthwhile in life. The Lord rejects the usual grounds for boasting—wisdom, strength, and riches. Ironically, these are the things people like to boast about—how successful they are, how strong they are, or how rich they are. These verses put life’s values in proper perspective. When all the nonessentials are laid aside, the only appropriate basis for boasting is that a person knows and understands the Lord (see 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:7; cf. Gal 6:14; Jas 1:9–10). Nothing apart from this fact has lasting worth. Whoever has that knowledge understands that the Lord exercises kindness (*esed*, better translated as “loyalty” or “faithful love”; see note on Jer 2:2). He also is the God who exercises “justice” (*mīpt*, a legal term suggesting God’s actions with regard to people are right because of his just nature). He also exercises righteousness (*edqā*, that which measures up to the norm of what is right). These three terms express the very heart of Hebrew religion. They are not only the attributes of God; he delights in those who manifest these same qualities (F. B. Huey, Jeremiah, Lamentations, vol. 16, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 121–122.)