

**TUTORIAL**  
**9.14**

# The purpose for which we exist

This tutorial looks at the second question under the area of *Life*: 'Are they gaining clarity about the true purpose for which they exist, and are they increasingly able to identify those things that hinder their life in Christ?'

Philippians 3:10: I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death.

In this passage you can see Paul's heart in that he realises death is necessary and that he needs to be associated with Christ in His death in order for life to come forth. There's actually an outworking that God wants to happen from that life, that we move towards something; there's actually a direction in which He wants us to head, and it's not just to maintain the status quo.

Even in the realm of a church, a group of God's people who somehow have that as their heartbeat, it's not just about maintaining or building up the church. It exists for a purpose and that involves death. It's kind of ironic or a paradox that when we talk about life and the plan of redemption, we also talk about death in the same breath. There's no other way to have that life apart from that, as Christ demonstrated for us so clearly.

## Last time

We looked at the first question from the WILD outline in the area of Life. We talked about people having a deepening relationship with Jesus and how that results in changes in their values and behavior. In this tutorial we will discuss the second question in the WILD outline in the area of Life.

**Are they gaining clarity about the true purpose for which they exist, and are they increasingly able to identify those things that hinder their life in Christ?**

We asked Philip and Kaikou what they see as being their purpose here on earth, as a church in that community:

The source of this new life that we received came through faith in what Christ has done for us. When we were saved God didn't take us out of the earth. He left us here to demonstrate this new life to

others, to those who are still in their old life and do not know Him. He has given His work to the church: to take His truth out to those who are still in darkness, and for us to teach God's Word to them so that they can know Him and enjoy new life as well. He wants us to live so that we can encourage one another as believers. Jesus was our example of Someone who revealed God to others and gave His life for the church.

The reason we are here is to represent Christ and that is something that we are thrilled about. We know that the new life that we have isn't going to finish because that comes from the Lord Himself. In our past lives we tried to do things but they really came to nothing. All the religious activity we did, we complained about and we wearied of it, but not now. Whatever work we do to strengthen the body or to extend His church, we are really enjoying it. We are happy to do it because He has given us this new life. Now God has given us the strength and ability to do His work and that is wonderful.

**Do they have a growing desire to understand why God has placed them in their particular place and time?**

Phil describes a growing understanding among the new believers of themselves within God's larger plan:

As we talk about that we say, "This is what God's saving you towards, being useful, and this is what He's demonstrating of Himself—drawing people to Himself." Part of His drawing people to Himself is to show what He's accomplished through what He's done. All that is part of this thing that He's drawing us into and wants us to understand and be a part of. The believers, as they get into this, are recognising, "You know what? It's not only my job to go through the day and just survive...the Lord has me here for a purpose. He wants what I'm doing. He wants to use me for whatever He's weaving together there, and one of the primary aspects of that is my own conformity to Him and the conformity of us as a group of believers to Him."

In Ephesians there's this imagery of the bride and the husband on their wedding day. The bride has put in quite a big investment of her own, you know, how she dresses and how this thing happens because she wants to look her best. We're trying to take that and use the imagery that is there and say, "This is what God's trying to do ... He's working, in the sense of conforming us, towards this ideal that He has. He's moving our collective and individual growth towards Him. It's resulting in this thing that closer resembles who He is. So His purity and all of these things—His righteousness, His

perfection—that's what He's moving us towards individually and collectively."

As they are beginning to see, "Oh this is why God saved me. He's saving me because He's in this process of conforming me and us into something, and not just us, but also the believers that are in this village, all of us that are believers here and all of us that are believers anywhere in the world at this given time, and also any believers over the course of time and into the future." For them to be sensing that as they go through Scripture, it's almost like the Lord keeps stretching how far they're seeing and how far they're recognising the implications of this. It's been cool to see them start to recognise, "We're brothers with these guys. We're brothers with guys in any other place. God's working and He's doing all this for this corporate sense and He's moving us towards Him and transforming us into His image, and that's important to Him."

**Is their perspective of why they exist being shaped by God's Word, His view of their Identity, and by the Discipleship relationship they have with Jesus Christ?**

Phil describes the process of cultural change taking place in the community:

In terms of seeing them look at cultural practices and then go, "Wait a second here, if this is true, this over here can't be true." With these clan leaders, who are really the core of the religious system, there's a veneer of Islam, but it's really these clan leaders and their relationship to the ancestors that is the core of the culture. These clan leaders, like I said before, we have quite a few of them attending the teaching and there's an abnormally high number of these guys relative to the population who are believers and growing in that. They've seen different things that stand out to them that say, "You know what, you can't keep doing this."

One of the situations that particularly stands out to me is these guys doing flour ceremonies. It's grain that they'll take to a tree and they'll sprinkle it on the ground. They'll take two handfuls of it and they'll drop it onto this little pile and they'll invoke the spirits. This is what they always used to do. When Islam came there was pressure from Islam to put God high, so they changed their ceremonies to start off with, "In the name of God who's most magnificent and kind," a typical Arabic reading, and then they would go into, "And now ancestors so and so, and ancestors so and so." It was simply a quick little cover for making these guys happy, to start off by asking Allah for this, "And now we're going get into the real ancestors."

One of the guys, he's from the most important clan, from the first clan to arrive here so he's dominant. Even if you're not from his clan you have to invoke the name of his clan's ancestors in any of your prayers. He's this dominant figure in the community and he started coming to the teaching and he started listening. Pretty early on, even before he was a believer, he was starting to recognize, "Hmm, the things that I'm saying are not true. I'm invoking spirits for help that can't help me and they aren't the most powerful spirits out there."

As time went on he became a believer. He's in charge of these flour ceremonies, he starts them and he ends them. He's the most important figure in the whole ceremony. He starts doing these ceremonies and he won't name an ancestor, he only prays to God. Then the next guy comes, the next more important person and it just goes down by level of importance until you get regular guys who want to do, they do it, and then that guy who started it comes back and wraps it up again. They were at the ceremony, and I was there listening to it. I've got it recorded. He's going through this whole thing where he's talking to God. The next guy happened to be a believer as well and they talked to God. Then a lot of the other guys that came, there was this mixture, probably a third of them were believers who wouldn't name an ancestor, and the other guys were naming ancestors. Then he comes back again, finishes it up and doesn't name an ancestor.

Somebody yelled from the back of the crowd as he finished up, they're like, "Aren't you going to name an ancestor, at least one?" He yells back—I don't know whether he knew who it was that said it or not—he said, "If I thought they could do something I'd pray to them, but I don't think they can do anything so I won't. I'm only going to pray to the One that actually can do something." That was his public response. There were all sorts of murmurings and carrying on as everybody dispersed at the end of that ceremony because of what he said. That's his job. He exists to be the link between the living members of this clan and the dead members of this clan. He's been given this responsibility... he wears a special hat, he gets special greetings, he has special taboos. It's kind of like the pope not doing mass. You're the most important guy who deals with the most important ancestors in this whole community, how is it that you're not appealing to them and not only not appealing, but in a public way saying, "I'm not going to do that"?

In my mind that's the sort of stuff that's sending the shock waves. We spend quite a bit of time on the identity side talking about Islam because that's what sticks out to us, that's what we see as what's most important. But if you're actually looking at what holds this

culture together, it's the ancestor side that's much more pivotal to the whole thing. We're coming to guys and we're saying, "What about life?", in the sense of when you die, what's going to happen, all this sort of stuff. If it's talking about going to Heaven or not going to Heaven, those are moot points, like who cares? Those aren't big deals. What's going to happen down in the future is, "I'm worried about right now, shortly after death, what's going to happen with all the ancestors and my spirit? That's the thing I'm worried about. I'm not really worried about day of judgement and whether there's eternal fire or not. I hear that from these religions, but that's not what worries me. That's not what keeps me up at night. What keeps me up at night is all these powers and whether my life force is being sucked away or not." They're the issues that are there. The spirit realm and the ancestor realm are the primary movers and shakers in that department.

This guy and a whole bunch of others perform rain ceremonies. It wasn't raining a few months ago and the amount of pressure that's on these guys to do these rain ceremonies is huge and a bunch of them, because they're believers, are resisting the rain ceremony or trying to modify the rain ceremony in some way to keep it from violating their consciousness. It was pretty cool to watch them go through that process.

**Are they learning to evaluate, with God's help, how well they are fitting into the purposes God has for them, the immediate challenges they face, and the areas that need to be adjusted to fulfill those purposes?**

Kaikou talks about the fact that, in this present life, sin is a constant reality that has to be dealt with appropriately in the church:

I wanted to add to what I was saying about our life in Christ. Like I said before, we are here on this earth and that's the way it is because God wants us here, but along with that is the presence of sin that we can't escape from now. Sometimes we are not strong enough to resist sin and we do things that we know are wrong, and we are surprised at ourselves that it still happens. In the past we didn't recognize sin for what it is, but in our new lives it has become really important to us to not get involved in things that we know to be wrong. The reason is that we see those things are obstacles to our growth, our lives, and our relationship with Jesus. We regularly talk about that with Him because we know that those things are not what He wants for us. We try to be open about those things with Him and apologize because we know that they really don't help our life and walk with Him.

Now Kaikou talks about a situation that he and the other elders dealt with and the steps that they took:

Another thing that relates to the life of church is when someone has been involved in something wrong for some time. I am talking about something that the individual refuses to recognize and that is affecting the entire body in that place. We are reminded in those cases of the situation in the Corinth where there was a very serious moral issue going on within the church. The Apostle Paul instructed them to deal with that issue and we take that very seriously in the life of the church here because we are conscious that sin like that can become a real obstacle to the life of the church. In cases like that, we follow a process to deal with the situation because not dealing with someone carefully like that is not showing love to that brother who has been involved in sin.

I am reminded of a real-life example that involved a young man. He got involved in something very wrong on one occasion and we worked with him to see it rectified. But he showed a lack of awe for God and he went back and did the same thing again. We went to him and tried to help him recognize it for what it was, but he refused. Then we went about dealing with the situation like this, one thing was that he was a worker in the church. He was a literacy teacher. We had sent him as part of our new outreach team. We began to follow the process the Bible lays out because we value our new life so much.

We went ahead and brought him back to his original sending church community. We spoke clearly to him and the matter was also made clear to all our ten community churches. We said that the church had put him outside its fellowship. Of course that had a profound effect on the young man, but also on all the churches. He was put out like that and it was difficult, but he gained a great deal in his life through that process. It helped us to gain insights from God's Word and we saw an even deeper respect for God's authority through that situation. The young man was eventually able to return under the protection of the fellowship and the nourishment of God's Word.

In the case study above, Kaikou eluded to a situation where a young man was taken back to his sending church. But he wasn't taken in chains. There was no one forcing him; he submitted to the authority of the leaders. This was the first time anything like this occurred in the church there. It was a significant thing at the time and also in the history of the church because of the way it was dealt with. It really served as an example of dealing with things that hinder the life of the church.

The young man went back to his home village which was high up on a mountain ridge. He walked into the village under these circumstances of

church discipline. He walked up the middle of the village and people were crying and weeping. No one came out as they normally would when someone comes home to their village, they just stood there and watched him walk up to his father's house. It was a real sense of devastation, that someone they'd sent out for the work of the church was now coming back under these circumstances. It had a huge impact in that village and the other village churches.

To cut a long story short, a couple of months later, Kaikou, who has a real discipleship heart, came and got the young man and took him to the village where he lived. There was a small hut next to his house. The young man lived in that house for a number of months and Kaikou went through God's Word with him, helping him to understand how to deal with his sin. They started in Romans. A year later, he was restored and had a part again in the outreach and today is married and is a significant part of the church. It is a beautiful story of actually loving a brother who has fallen into sin.

In each of the case studies in this tutorial, we saw that God's intent for the church is to exist with purpose. It's not just to exist. We need to look at things that might hinder us and not just gloss them over. Instead of saying, "Those are his problems, not my problems," we can start recognizing, "We're together, a body, and God wants our body to be used for His glory to actually reach out to others." We need to see anything that might hinder that as something we should deal with, and we should deal with it in a loving way so that the person can be healed and we can function and exist and do the things that God is wanting for us.



## ACTIVITIES

*The purpose for which we exist*

1. In a few paragraphs identify some of the key elements and events that shaped a growing understanding of God's specific purposes for the early church in Acts. Comment on how that account might relate to a new church in a minority group today.