

FORMED FOR GOD'S FAMILY

Based on Rick Warren's

The Purpose Driven Life – Part 3

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The Scripture

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

The Sermon

Adelina Dominguez is dead. You may not have heard of her, but she was the oldest living woman in America. At 114, she outlived all her

children and some of her grandchildren. When asked the secret of her longevity, she replied, "I knew God had a purpose for my life."

I wish you all that kind of longevity. Even more, I wish you that **certainly** about God's purpose for your life. You are not some cosmic accident. You are here for a reason and these *40 Days of Purpose* are designed to help you discover it. Knowing God's purpose may not increase the **length** of your life, but it will certainly transform its **value**.

Last week we learned God's **first** purpose for your life – to know and love God. The Bible calls this **worship** and you were **planned for God's pleasure**. Today, we look at the **second** great purpose for your life – you were **formed for God's family**. To love God, you must love His family. Your owner's manual says in Hebrews 2:10, "*God is the one who made all things, and all things are for His glory. He wanted to have many children share His glory.*" The Bible says in Ephesians 1:5, "*His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by*

bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ.” The Bible – every chapter and verse of it – is the story of God gathering His children.

Adelina Dominguez may have outlived her children and some of her grandchildren, but her spiritual family will last forever. Your **physical** family is important. That's where you learn to be human, but your **spiritual** family teaches you how to be a child of God.

How many of you are parents? Do you want your children to get along? Of course you do. We hate it when our children fight. From the time Ronnie was born, our kids would fight in the car. I'm sure none of **you** have that problem! I remember when we bought our first minivan. It was great! Julie had her seat, Ronnie had own seat, and they wouldn't fight any more, right? Wrong! Ronnie would reach over from the back seat and poke his sister, just to hear her squeal. I found myself yelling at both of them. “Ronnie, leave your sister alone!” “Julie, the only reason he's doing it is because of what you do when he does. Ignore him and he's stop.”

Some would say that Adam and Eve's greatest punishment was not getting kicked out of the Garden, not discovering shame, not losing eternal life. It was having one of their children kill the other. The Bible says in 1 Peter 2:17: "*Love your spiritual family.*" Write this down: "My second purpose in life is **Fellowship**." That's the Bible word for loving each other.

Worship is loving **God**. **Fellowship** is loving God's **family**. The Bible says in 1 John 4:21, "*The person who loves God must also love other believers.*" Even if you don't **like** them. Even if you **disagree** with them. Even when they're **mean** to you, say bad things **about** you, and **hurt** your feelings. **They** have to answer to God for what they say and do. **You** have to answer for how you respond.

The Bible says in 1 Timothy 3:14-15, "*I'm writing so that you'll know how to live in the family of God. That family is the church.*" The church is not a building. The church is not a steeple. The church is not an institution. The church is not an organization. The church is not a

social club. The **church** is a family. Too many people say, “I’m **going** to church” as if it were a **geographic location**. The church is not a **place** you **go to**, it is a **family** you **belong to**.

Like all families, we get on each other’s nerves from time to time, we might even fight and fuss and feud, but you **never** walk out on family. God said of Adam, “It is not good for man to be alone,” so He gave him a wife and, eventually, a family. Nothing has changed since then. It’s not good for man, or woman, or child to be alone. We **need** each other. Even if you have no spouse, no parents, no children, no brothers or sisters, you need your fellow Christians because they’re your **church** family.

There are four levels of **fellowship** in the family of God. The first is **membership**. We’re not talking about names on a roll. There are far too many who **claim** to be members but never show up. We’re talking about “**Choosing to belong**.” We’re talking about **finding** a church family and **becoming** an active part of it. We’re talking about **getting**

and **staying** connected. The Bible says in Ephesians 2:19, "*You are members of God's very own family and you belong in God's household with every other Christian.*"

The Christian life is more than just **believing**, it's **belonging**, and you and I must **choose** to belong. You don't get to **pick your parents**, but do you get to **choose your church**. As the knight said to Indiana Jones, "You must choose, choose wisely."

Have you ever heard someone say, "I'm a Christian, but I don't believe in organized religion." What's their option? **Disorganized** religion? Some claim to be Christian but don't attend church. That's like saying, "I'm a football player, but not part of any team." It doesn't work. You might get to carry the ball every play, but I guarantee you that you're going to get sacked. It's like saying, "I'm a tuba player, but I'm not part of an orchestra." A tuba sounds pretty silly by itself. It's like saying, "I'm a bee, but I'm not part of the hive." Good luck when winter comes. It's like being a soldier without a platoon. They might talk about

“An Army of One,” but that’s the **last** thing you want to be when you’re behind enemy lines. A Christian without a church family is an orphan.

The Bible says in Romans 12:5, “*In Christ we who are many form one Body, and each member belongs to all the others.*” By choosing to be a Christian, we are choosing to be connected to **every other** Christian. We are members of Christ’s family. We stand together and we fall together. We laugh together and we cry together. We’re a family.

Did you know that “membership” is a Christian word? It comes from the Bible. Today it’s used for participating in a club, for signing up for this, or joining that. Sam’s Club calls their customers “members.” The world may steal and redefine our terms, but the meaning of membership is found in Romans 12. A member of your **body** is an organ, a limb, or an appendage. Your hand is a **member** of your body and we are **members** of one another because we’re part of **Christ’s** body here on earth. Being a member is not about joining a club, wearing special hats, or having signs and handshakes. It’s about connection.

Suppose you're the liver in the Body of Christ. You can't amputate yourself from one body and run around attaching yourself here and then there. If you did that with a **physical** organ, it would shrivel up and die. Sure, we live in a time when transplants are possible – they've saved many lives – but you can only do it once, and then only with severe risk of rejection and infection. Most people with transplanted organs spend the rest of their lives taking anti-rejection medicine and, once an organ is removed from its recipient, you can't put it back in the donor or into any **other** recipient. The only thing you can **do** with it is throw it away.

The same is true of you and me. We need to attach ourselves to a body of believers and stay attached. We need to be members of a local expression of the body of Christ.

The second level of **fellowship** is **friendship**. The Bible says in Acts 2:44, "*All the believers met together constantly and shared everything with each other.*" Do you know why so many people are so **lonely**? It's because they don't take the **time** to **form** and **keep** deep

friendships. They're too busy **achieving, working, raising their families, doing other things**. They're not willing to put the time it takes into building and maintaining long term relationships. True friendship is not luck, it's choice. It's **choosing** to spend **time** with another person, time enough to **know** them.

It's about sharing. Children are not **born** sharers. They need to be **taught** to share by placing them in situations where they **have** to share and then **praising** them for doing so. Do you know what God expects from us as His family the church? He expects us to share.

That's where small groups come in. We can **worship** in a crowd, but we can only learn to **share** in a small group. The Bible says in Hebrews 10:25, "*Let us not give up the habit of meeting together. Instead, let us encourage one another.*" The primary purpose of a small group is to encourage each other. The Bible says, "Don't give up the habit." I hope you never give up the habit some of you have started these

40 Days, because you're always going to need encouragement. You're always going to need to know someone cares.

Some of you are **not** in a small group. I don't want you to **pressured** into joining one. I don't want you feel like there's something **wrong** with you for **not** joining, but I **do** know that there's **so much** you could get out of a group that I **urge** you to **give it a try**. In a month, this'll all be over. Please try it before it's too late.

Most of you are having great experiences in your group. I love hearing about what's happening. A few of you may have tried a group and, to be honest, you just don't fit in. What should you do? I suggest you try another! We have dozens of groups and, as we continue to outgrow our building, more and more of them are going to meet in homes and other places off campus. If you don't fit in **one** group, try another. If you can't find one that meets your needs, start your own. Julie Baliva is our Small Group Coordinator. She'll provide you with the

resources you need. **You** just need to provide the site and a group of likeminded people.

It's like eating out. Suppose you went to a restaurant and the prices were too high and the service was terrible and the food was awful. What would you do? Would you say, "I'm never going to eat out again!"? Of course not! You'd find a new restaurant or go back to an old favorite. How many of you **bought** the first house you looked at? How many of you **married** the first person you dated? I hope you're happy with your small group – most of you are – but, if you've found a place where you don't fit in, that's okay. We're a big church. We start new groups all the time. As your pastor, I give you permission to try another group. You're not **stuck** where you're at. You just need to find the right group.

The third level of **fellowship** is **partnership**. **Membership** means choosing to belong. **Friendship** means learning to share. **Partnership** means **doing my part**. It recognizes that I've got a contribution to make to the family of God. God did not bring you to Sugar Creek to sit and

soak in some spiritual spa. God brought you here to serve. God wants to make a difference in your life, but He also wants to make a difference **through** your life. Every family has its chores, based on the ages and abilities of its members. The church is God's family. Everyone has their chores to do, based upon their ability and maturity. We need each other. **Fellowship** means **choosing** to be belong, **learning** to share, and **doing** your part. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 3:9. "*We are partners working together for God.*"

Which leads us to the deepest –ship of all. Beyond **membership**, **friendship**, and **partnership** is **kinship**. When somebody dies or has an accident, who do the authorities call? That's right, their "next-of-kin!" Not just **any** relative, but the one closest **to** you, the one who cares the most **about** you, the one who **holds** you most dear.

Kinship is **loving other believers like they were your closest family.**" Not "second cousin twice removed," but next of kin. It's loving them like they were **blood relatives** because, in Christ, we share the

same blood Jesus shed for our redemption. The Bible says in Acts 2:42, *“They were like family to each other”* and in Romans 12:10, *“Be devoted to each other like a loving family.”* It means reaching the point where we're willing to **sacrifice** ourselves for each other.

Most of us know John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* The problem is, too few of us know *1st* John 3:16. It says, *“We know what real love is because Christ gave up His life for us. And we ought to give up our lives for our Christian brothers and sisters.”* This is the **deepest** level of fellowship; being willing to sacrifice ourselves for each other as we would for our closest relatives and loved ones.

Loving **God** is Worship. Loving **each other** is Fellowship. We do both because God first loved us. Jesus said in John 13:35, *“Your strong love for each other will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”* Sugar Creek has accomplished a great deal over the past nine years. I

believe that our greatest years are ahead of us, but I want this church to be known, not for our accomplishments, not for our size, sermons, singing, structures, or even our youth program. These are important but, when people talk about Sugar Creek, I want them to say, "That's the church where they love each other." That's what Christianity is all about – loving God and learning to love each other. Warren says, "When people find a church, a place where there is genuine love, you'd have to lock the doors to keep people away, because people are not looking for religion, they are looking for a family. They are not looking for doctrine; they are looking for love."

1 John 3:10 says, "*Anyone who does not love other Christians does not belong to God.*" 1 John 4:20 says, "*Those who do not love their brothers and sisters, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have never seen.*" 1 John 3:14 says, "*But if we love our Christian brothers, it proves that we have passed from death to eternal life.*"

Will you pray with me?

“Dear God, I want to be part of your family. I want to worship you and I want grow in fellowship with your people. I’m done floating around. I want to find a church home and stick with it. I want to love and share and take the time it takes to form deep friendships. I want to do my part for your family. I want to love other believers like they were my next of kin because, in Jesus, they are. Teach me the meaning of love. I give myself to you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”