

CREATED TO WORSHIP

“Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions.” – John Piper

Why Do I Live?

Yohannan was the youngest of six boys, born into poverty in the village of Niranam in southern India. He would not wear shoes until after his seventeenth birthday, and even then, his ninety-pound frame hardly filled them. Yet God had a mysterious plan for this humble village boy.

At age eight, God brought young “Yohannan” salvation, and at age sixteen, God called him to missionary service in northern India. For the next seven years, this young man tirelessly labored in bringing the gospel to all he encountered, many of them having never even heard the name of Jesus.

Eventually, through the miracle of God’s sovereignty, this young man would

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be led to the persons and the means by which he would come to study the Bible in the US—and the rest would quickly become history.

Today, K. P. Yohannan is founder and president of the largest mission organization in the world, *Gospel for Asia*. He has published hundreds of books and stirred countless people around the globe toward a fresh understanding of missions. In his various writings, he often relays stories and conversations from his Indian missionary journeys. In one particular account from *Revolution in World Missions*, K.P. describes a friendly exchange he had with a young Indian student there.

“What are you doing?” I asked the lad.

“I go to school,” was the reply.

“Why do you go to school?”

“To study,” he said.

“Why do you study?”

“To get smart.”

“Why do you want to get smart?”

“So I can get a good job.”

“Why do you want to get a good job?”

“So I can make lots of money.”

“Why do you want to make lots of money?”

“So I can buy food.”

“Why do you want to eat?”

“To live.”

“Why do you live?”

With that, the little boy confusedly asked, “Sir, why do I live?”

Sound familiar? This conversation could very well have happened anywhere on the planet, perhaps even in our own hearts. That’s because we are all asking the same question, the question of purpose. Rick Warren, for example, obviously hit a nerve when he wrote *The Purpose Driven Life*, an international bestseller. Even many Christians still cannot articulate an answer to the purpose question. And if we can’t answer the question for our own lives in our own setting, how could we expect to travel thousands of miles to places like India to answer it for someone else? However, the question of purpose isn’t really about

figuring out what we're supposed to be *doing*. It's about discovering who we *are*.

Not All Who Believe in God are Worshippers of God

Like me, there are many Christians out there who can identify as a Christian or even a missionary. We often refer to ourselves as *Believers*. Yet what does that mean? James 2:19 says, "Even the demons believe—and shudder." So what separates me from demons if we both believe in the reality of the same God?

Similarly, Romans 1:21 speaks of the lost, "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him." That also sounds pretty confusing.

So to be clear, the Bible tells us that there are demons who believe and fear God and that even the lost know God in some way. So what separates the true Believer from these?

Can we say with the priests of old, "You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is

in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you” (Neh. 9:6)? Can we say with the psalmist, “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!” (Ps. 95:6)?

Though every knee will eventually bow and every tongue eventually confess Jesus Christ as Lord, it is only those who do their bowing and confessing in this life that will be permitted into God’s Kingdom. For those who are in Christ, we are called and compelled toward the one thing that both the demons and the lost cannot even comprehend. As Christians, we are invited to do what we were made to do for Eternity—*worship*.

Now, if you’re anything like I was, you’re snickering to yourself right now, “Great, we all get to sing four hundred-year-old organ hymns until we’re so tired we fall off of our heavenly pews.” But that would be the wrong picture of the wrong idea, not to mention the wrong religion. The idea we are going for is intimate relationship, and the picture is somewhere between God’s loving embrace and his awesome wonder and

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majesty. Worship is the expression of a heart of deep, genuine gratitude, not some mundane, mindless mantra.

God has invited us into a relationship in which we know him, love him, and admire him for what he has done for us. God, in his Son Jesus, lived a perfect life and then died on a Cross for you and me and for every sin we've ever committed. Jesus felt the weight of everything foul in this world as he suffered, and that, in fact, *was* his suffering! We couldn't even begin to pay the penalty for one vulgar thought, and yet Jesus paid for all the evils of the world in one cruel moment.

“For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations” (Isa. 61:11).

This is the work of God, redeeming not just us, but those from every tongue, tribe, and nation to himself (Rev. 14:6). By his grace and through his awesome power, God is rescuing the lost from every corner of the globe and transforming them into true worshipers of himself. The Christian God does not simply impress us with his power like every other world religion; He

ransoms us with his blood. Therein lies the paradox of the Christian faith, that God is both humble enough to be reviled and ridiculed on a Roman Cross and yet sovereign enough to command the entire universe.

What's So Great About Heaven?

When we think about God in the context of a loving, redemptive relationship, Heaven seems a lot nearer. Yet there is a veil between this life and the next. 1 Corinthians 13:12 puts it this way, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face." And let's keep in mind that looking into a first century mirror was a lot like trying to find your reflection in a soup spoon. So when Paul says "dim," he really means it.

We see so little of God right now in this body of flesh and blood, but it's important to remember that what we do see ought to make us long for him like we long for nothing else. That being said, if God has created a way for us to know him so intimately and so powerfully here on earth, we simply can't even begin to imagine the overwhelming awe and wonder of

God's glory "face to face" in heaven. Thus, heaven is not our goal; Jesus is. Heaven, though no doubt spectacular in itself, is simply the divine meeting place for God and his people.

Why Doesn't Everyone Worship God?

That leaves us with a really important question. "If God is so great and so real, why don't more people worship him?"

This brings us to the heart of Christianity. If we go back to Romans 1, we learn that God reveals Himself in such a way that everyone is seeing at least a part of Him. One well-seasoned missionary, Don Richardson, in his book *Eternity in their Hearts* (a reference to Ecclesiastes 3:11), tells the story of his encounter with various people groups who, unbelieving, were not without many customs, morals, and religious practices that at least somewhat mimicked Christianity. Richardson was able to use these similarities as connecting points in bringing the gospel to previously unreached people groups. No one can deny God in their heart of hearts. Yet not everyone comes to salvation.

That's because salvation is a special work of grace that God does only in those he calls to be his children. Now, the "why some and not others" question is a bit of a mystery as we find out in Romans 9-11. But what we do know is that God is actively drawing people to himself. And though he can and does use many different means to accomplish this, we learn from Scripture (and from experience) that he does have one *primary* vehicle in taking the Good News of salvation to a lost world—us.

Paul puts it this way in Romans 10. "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" I think you can follow Paul's logic here. Like blind beggars, many are moving through life with deep, pressing questions about the source and meaning of life, yet without the vision to see the answer. Without heavenly intervention, these wanderers might never see the light of day. That is where you and I and countless other brothers and sisters come into play.

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The Bible calls us “ambassadors,” that is, card-carrying representatives of the Gospel of Jesus to a lost and dying world (2 Cor. 5:20). We, therefore, as Christians, are God’s chosen means by which the gospel moves forward to the ends of the earth. Paul boasts in Romans 10, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” That’s because those beautiful feet are bringing salvation to the lost and, ultimately, leading people into lives (and eternities) of *worship*.

As John Piper so rightly points out, “Missions exist because worship doesn’t.” Thus, where worship is complete, namely in heaven, there will be no more missions. Yet while we sojourn this earth as sojourners *away* from home, missions will always be a part of God’s plan for our lives inasmuch as God desires worship.

But what if we *aren’t* preaching the good news? What if, even as Christians, we don’t find ourselves truly longing for God and for his Kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10)?

Worship Misdirected: Idolatry

John Piper goes on to clarify in his book, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, that worship is

both the *purpose* and the *fuel* of missions. Consequently, if we have a sharing, or, more broadly, even a sin problem, we ultimately have a *fuel* problem. It's like taking a road trip to the beach. We may know the destination, but if we don't have the fuel to get there, no amount of hoping or wishing or planning is going to move our automobile so much as an inch. Likewise, you won't be getting anywhere filling your tank full of food and water. While that may be fuel for our bodies, our automobiles don't operate that way. We can't use just any fuel; it has to be the *right* fuel.

Our natural tendency is to try to insert physical fuels into a spiritual tank. We gorge ourselves on the latest cultural frills and thrills. Television and video games all too easily replace spiritual disciplines like meditation and solitude. The latest wave of internet chat programs competes with prayer and Bible reading. Then there are the more obvious, devious attractions like pornography, romance novels, drug and alcohol addiction, compulsory lying or theft, and the list goes on. I even read one recent report claiming that pedophilia was just another expression of

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love and, therefore, perfectly defensible and permissible. Tragically, the world's definition of "life well-lived" continues to shift from what is redemptive and holy to what is perverse and ultimately, destructive.

Romans 1:23 describes such a state of the soul. Rome "... exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things." We could expand that list to include cars, money, entertainment, education, and even things like dreams, goals, family, and religion. Yes, even God's gifts like family and church can be an obstacle if they replace God himself as the center of our affections and our worship.

We were all created with the capacity to worship, and really, we all *do* worship. The difference lies in the *object* of our worship. Even Christians can miss this. For the first part of my Christian life, my object of worship was *service to* Christ and not Christ himself. My loose definition of worship produced in me a Christianity that was lazy, lax, and easy. The world, and the devil, for that

matter, had no qualms with me. I was fruitless and barren, a worship center of one that affected no one and nothing. As I mistakenly served Christ for the increased love and acceptance I thought I could earn from him, I was oblivious to God's hunger for my worship and to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Instead of being drawn to Christ, I was drawn to the benefits of being a Christian. In a world in which everything from politics to jobs to friendships is largely self-serving, it is easy to project that kind of thinking on Christianity.

Our Highest Pleasure

Too often, we end up settling for the cheap, two-bit imitations of real happiness. The irony is that in a culture so consumed with constantly upping the ante on the highs of temporal pleasures, the highest and most undeniable pleasure of all—Jesus—is a rock of offense (Isa. 8:14; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:8). Why?

The world does its best to diminish the difference between true worship and idolatry. Satan would have us believe it is more like splitting hairs, but really, the

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chasm between these two practices could not be further apart. These are two forks in a road that never converge. One fork is for those stubborn thrill seekers bent on earning and controlling only a perceived happiness, while the other leads to a life of real happiness that is *given*, not acquired. That's because God alone is both our source and our cause for true happiness and contentment.

Our highest calling and our highest pleasure is found in what will always be folly to the world, that is, Jesus himself. Are you lacking in motivation to walk in obedience to Jesus? Are you enticed by the mindless "fun" of a lost world? Is Bible reading a chore instead of a desire? Is it painstaking to get up for church in the morning? Is God just somewhere on the periphery; does he get sidelined all too easily? Has sin taken over in such a way that it seems impossible to get out from under it? Are you driven by a paralyzing hunger for safety and security? Do you constantly feel backed into a corner defending your faith? Do you worry and fret about what tomorrow may bring? Do you question whether you will even see heaven at all?

Is your living characterized by simply trying to keep from dying?

The solution to all these questions is the same—*worship*. But that's easier said than done. Arriving at concepts is much easier than arriving at a real way of life. Thankfully, there are those who have “been there, done that,” those who can inspire and encourage with their stories of strength and commitment to God. Yet it may be comforting to know also that these “heroes of the faith” were by no means perfect. Just like us, they were afflicted with faults and failures, with weaknesses and insecurities.

Who are these people, you ask? The full list includes prostitutes, murderers, thieves, drunkards, and persecutors of Christianity. Like us, these were ordinary, if not extraordinarily terrible people. Yet the work of the Holy Spirit is without limits if we put our trust in Jesus. He brings life from death and beauty from ashes. As was the case with the apostle Paul, Christianity's first missionary, a fervent hatred was transformed into an even fiercer love. Even so, the testimonies of those heroes before us are not

testimonies of man's resilience, but of the awesome transformational power of God and his Word proclaimed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What separates us from demons if we both believe in God?
- If God is really so great, why doesn't everyone worship him?
- What is God's primary vehicle in spreading the Good News?
- What are some of the cultural and personal idols that we worship, and how does this kind of misdirected worship affect our Christian testimony?