

2006

Up and Running

After months of eager anticipation and careful preparation, the **40 Days of Purpose** programme has been launched at Durham Road Baptist Church. And so we are now up and running! Over 200 churches throughout the UK will be participating in the programme in the run up to Easter. Since its launch in 2002, over 1,100 churches in Britain have benefited from the programme.

The **40 Days of Purpose** programme is based on a best-selling book by Rick Warren, called *The Purpose Driven Life*. Published in 2002, it quickly topped the New York Times' best-sellers list, and remained there for the next 99 weeks. It is estimated that it now sells about 1 million copies worldwide per month. You can even buy it on-line from Tesco's!

Initially we ordered 20 copies of the book, wondering if we would be left with unsold stock on our hands, but we need not have worried. Those 20 copies were quickly snapped up, as were a further ten we purchased. Now we are now rapidly working our way through an extra dozen books we ordered!

Don't start there, but here!

In his opening chapter, entitled *It All Starts with God*, Rick Warren points out that *"the search for the purpose of life has puzzled people for thousands of years. That's because we typically begin at the wrong starting point – with ourselves. We ask self-centred questions like 'What do I want to be? What should I do with my life? What are my goals, my ambitions, my dreams for my future? But focussing on ourselves will never reveal our life's purpose. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfilment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose and for his purpose'"* (Col 1.16).

Over its six-week duration, the **40 Days of Purpose** programme will home in on five key purposes for which God made us. These will be explored through our two Sunday services and small discussion groups.

Get involved

Over 30 people have signed up for our small groups so far, but it's never too late to get involved! There are five groups to choose from. In addition to a couple of

groups on a Wednesday evening, there will also be one on a Monday evening for those who find Wednesday nights difficult. There is a special group for those in their 20's, which will generally be held on a Monday evening, and also a daytime group scheduled for Thursday afternoons. We hope that as many people in the fellowship as possible will be able to get along to one of these groups.

A Spiritual Journey

In our preparations for the programme, we likened it to a journey. Just as the Israelites were taken on a journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, so God wants to take us on a journey of discovery over the next six or seven weeks.

The Israelites' journey wasn't simply a physical or geographical journey. God always intended it to be a spiritual journey for his people. It was a journey from slavery to freedom, from bondage in Egypt to liberty in the land of God's promise. As such, that journey is a picture of the journey God wants to take us on.

Jesus reminded us that *everyone who sins is a slave to sin* (John 8.34). All too easily, we are trapped by our own self-centred desires and enslaved by the destructive tendencies of our fallen sinful nature. We are hostages to the negative influences of the increasingly corrupt society in which we find ourselves living. Referring to Satan, Jesus spoke of him as *the thief [who] comes only to steal, kill, and destroy* (John 10.10).

This is why God wants to liberate us from all that's negative in our lives. He wants to bring us into the true freedom that only his Son can provide for us.

If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!

[John 8.36]

God wants to take us on a profound spiritual journey from slavery to liberty, in order that he might fulfil his overarching purpose for us.

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. [Romans 8.28-29]

God's ultimate purpose for our lives is that our character becomes like that of his Son. God wants to

turn us into little replicas of Jesus, as far as our characters are concerned. And through everything that happens to us, God is working towards that end. This is the journey he is seeking to take us on.

When the Israelites journeyed from Egypt to the land God had promised them, sadly, few of them learned the lessons God intended to teach them. Instead, they were resistant and rebellious, and as a result, perished along the way without ever reaching the state God intended to give them. Only Joshua and Caleb made it to the Promised Land, out of the tens of thousands who had left Egypt.

And so if our journey with God over the next few weeks is going to be successful, there are two commitments we have to make.

Be Open to God

We have to be committed to being truly open with God – open to whatever he wants to say to us, and open to whatever direction he wants to take us in.

*"Today, if you hear God's voice,
do not harden your hearts."
[Heb 3.7-8,15; 4.7]*

- God can't take us anywhere if we think we already know what is best for our lives.
- God can't take us anywhere in his purposes if we reckon we've got everything sorted, and we're OK as we are.
- God can only take us onwards in his purposes if we're willing to follow him, whatever the cost.
- During this spiritual journey, there will be moments of great joy as we make new discoveries.
- But there will also be many painful moments as God puts his finger on issues that he wants us to deal with. There may be longstanding character flaws that we've tolerated for far too long. We might have excused ourselves in the past by saying, "It's just the way I am," or "It's the way I've been brought up." These next few weeks between now and Easter will be a time for putting away those kind of lame excuses. It will be an opportunity to get real with God in ways that we may have never done so before.

Be Determined to Finish

But there also needs to be a commitment to finish the course. You will remember the problem Abraham had when he was called to leave his homeland to go to a new country God would show him. He was told to leave his family and friends behind (Gen 12.1), but some of them wanted to go with him. What a hindrance that proved to be! Some chose to settle

down half-way before they reached the land that God had promised Abraham - and he chose to settle down with them (Gen 11.31). And as long as Abraham was stuck halfway, he wasn't in a position to receive *anything* of what God wanted to give him!

God's greatest blessings are for those who complete the course he sets before us, not for those who merely set out with good intentions. You will remember Magnus Magnusson's famous catchphrase on the quiz programme *Mastermind*: "I've started, so I'll finish." That must be our attitude to this *40 days of Purpose* programme. The greatest blessings will be for those who see it through to the end.

*Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."
[John 4.34]*

Rise to the Challenge

So let me encourage you to attend *both* Sunday services over the next seven weeks, and to get involved in a small group. Let me encourage you to read a chapter of *The Purpose Driven Life* *every* day until you have finished the book. Try and memorise each of the six key verses. We will even be giving you a key ring to help you! Make the 40 Days of Purpose programme your priority over the next six weeks.

*Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
[Psalm 90.12]*

These next six or seven weeks are an opportunity for us all to number off 40 days out of the 25,000 that God may give us over the course of our lifetime, in order *that we may gain a heart of wisdom* – a heart that knows what it's right to do, and has the sense to get on and do it!

News Round Up

- For the second year running, we were delighted to be recipients of the prestigious Tyne and Wear High Sheriff's Award, "*in recognition of great and valuable services to the community*" as our certificate puts it! I hope to include a photograph of the presentation in next month's newsletter.
- Let me say a big 'Thank you' to all of you who supported me in your prayers during my recent visit to India. Details of the trip appear in the March edition of our IREF(UK) Newsletter. Please let me know if you would like a copy.

David Hunt