

2006

AN EXCELLENT START

By the time you read this Newsletter, we will be just over half way through our *40 days of Purpose* journey. What a blessing it has been to so many of us already! 45 different people have participated in our Small Groups (so far!) and it has been encouraging to see the enthusiasm with which our crèche, Sunday School and Bible Class children and young people have taken to their age-group Journals (appropriate alternatives to *The Purpose Driven Life* book).

- Let's continue to pray that God will build us all up spiritually through this excellent programme.
- Pray that the upshot will be people committing their lives to Jesus for the first time, or perhaps re-dedicating their lives with a new level of enthusiasm.
- Pray that some will come forward for baptism and church membership.
- Pray that many will discover the particular spheres of service for which God has shaped them.
- Pray for the young people in our *Rock Solid* and *Fit for Life* Clubs, as they have been taken through the main points of the programme. Pray that they will discover their true purpose in life.

TAKING STOCK

At our recent Deacons Away Day, we took the opportunity to share with each other what God had been teaching us personally through the *40 Days of Purpose* programme. I invited each person to share what they had found personally helpful for their own life; what they had found personally challenging; and something of significance for our corporate life as a church fellowship. Here are the three lessons I shared (I will let the other leaders speak for themselves!).

(a) Life as a Test

Early on in the course, we were encouraged to think of some of the different metaphors people use to describe their life. For instance,

- Some people picture their life as a *suitcase* – they try to cram as much into it as they can!
- Other people view life as a *game* or a battle – emerging as a winner is all that matters. 'Win at all costs' is their motto.
- Some people picture life as a *mint* – not a peppermint, but the Royal Mint; it's for making money!
- Other people see life as being like a *bus stop* – they're hanging around waiting for something to happen.
- Some people reckon life is like a *North Sea oil-drilling rig* – boring, all the time!

- For other people, life is like a *fairground carousel* – it has its ups and downs but basically, it's just going round in circles, not getting anywhere.

How we picture life determines what we expect to get out of it.

- The person who pictures life as a *party* is expecting life to be full of fun.
- The person who pictures life as a *rollercoaster ride* is expecting it to be full of thrills - exhausting but exhilarating – and perhaps even terrifying at times.

If our metaphor for life is false, we will constantly be frustrated that life isn't delivering what we expect from it. And so it's important that we adopt *Biblical* metaphors for life. There are plenty to choose from, of course. But the one I found most helpful was to view life as a test. We are familiar with the phrase 'continual assessment' from the world of education. And in a sense, our life is like a continual assessment exercise. ***God's concern is not for our comfort, but for our character development***, to make us more like Jesus.

"All of life is a test," writes Rick Warren [p42-43]. "God continually tests people's character, faith, obedience, love, integrity and loyalty." ***Our character is both revealed and refined by being tested*** (2 Chron 32.31). "God constantly watches your response to people, problems, success, conflict, illness, disappointment, and even the weather! He even watches the simplest actions such as when you open a door for others, or when you're polite to a waitress. ***Every moment is an opportunity to demonstrate love, depend on God, and deepen your character.***"

(b) The Priority of Relationships

The *40 Days of Purpose* programme places a lot of emphasis on the importance of developing quality relationships, and the role of the local church in helping to bring this about. This is a particular challenge to activists, the 'Martha's of this world' (Luke 10.39-42). I was particularly challenged by these comments of Rick Warren [p124-5].

"Often we act as if relationships are something to be squeezed into our schedule. We talk about 'finding' time for our children or 'making' time for people in our lives" – as if there were much more important things for us to do with our time. "But God says ***relationships are what life is all about***. After learning to love God (worship), learning to love his people (fellowship) is the second most important purpose of our life. When our schedules become overloaded, we start skimming relationally, cutting back on the time, energy and attention that loving relationships require. ***Busyness is a great enemy of relationships.***"

"The best use of life is love; the best expression of love is time; the best time to love is now" [p128]. We mustn't ever get so busy that we don't have time for people.

The local church is God's laboratory for learning loving relationships [p133]. This is why every Christian needs to be fully committed to a local church [ps 133-5]. An organ detached from the body it's meant to be a part of will soon shrivel and die

(c) The Value of Small Groups

The *40 Days of Purpose* programme has provided an opportunity for us to meet in small groups for the first time in recent years. And what a blessing they have been! We have been able to learn together, share together, support and serve each other, and pray for each other in ways that are much harder in larger gatherings. It's good to learn and worship in large numbers, but fellowship is best deepened in small groups.

We spent some time at our Deacons Away Day thinking about how we could build from our positive experience of our Small Groups. We want to see the *40 Days of Purpose* programme not as an end in itself, but as a launch pad for our future progress.

Tentatively, we have planned to hold a couple of 'whole church' midweek meetings on the last two Wednesday evenings in April, for prayer and church business. Then we are looking to run the six-session CPAS course, *Lost For Words*, in small groups throughout May and June (with the last Wednesday in the month being an opportunity to come together for prayer). This way we hope we will secure the best of both worlds – the benefit of meeting in small groups and also the value of coming together as a church for prayer.

Small Groups don't guarantee good fellowship in themselves. Rick Warren recognises that they can be a source of division and fracture [p140] if not handled correctly. But when they work well, they can be a key building block to enriched church life. So please pray that we will be led to the right leaders for them; that the leaders will be given a clear briefing, and stick to it (!); and that we will be able to retain all the valuable elements of our *40 days of Purpose* small groups - discipleship, fellowship, service, worship, and mission.

Lost for Words is a course designed to help us share our faith more effectively with other people. It would be excellent if the 45 people who have participated in our *40 Days of Purpose* small groups all became trained in sharing their faith more effectively with other people.

GET INTO SHAPE

When I prepared some material for our Ministry Fair, I was amazed at how many opportunities for service there are, just in connection with our Sunday services. Take a look at what I mean:

- set up chairs, music stands, etc before service
- set up and operate pa system

- set up and operate tape recorder;
- set up ohp and any other electrical services
- set up communion (twice a month)
- welcome people on arrival; give out Bibles, hymnbooks
- befriend newcomers
- provide music – play instruments
- join singing group for learning new songs; provide solos, duets, etc
- organise Bible readers
- help with crèche, Sunday School, Bible class
- help with catering for International Teas
- oversee tape library and distribution of tapes to crèche/Sunday School/Bible Class teachers;
- keep notice-boards up-to-date
- keep leaflet tract-stands well stocked
- keep visitors map up-to-date.
- produce new display banners; replace old ones
- clear away chairs, etc after service

And this doesn't even include planning the service and preparing the preaching! There is plenty of work for everyone to do. A church is not intended to be like a hotel, where we are waited on hand and foot. A church is intended to be like a family, in which every member has their own particular responsibilities. Consider carefully your unique S-H-A-P-E [chs 30-32] and what God wants you to do with it.

ALWAYS GRATEFUL

We are continually grateful and amazed at the abundant way in which God provides for all our material needs.

I reported in last month's News Letter that we were thrilled to have been awarded the Tyne and Wear High Sheriff's award for the second year



running. Philip Pearson and Christopher Hunt (two of our Rock Solid Club members) travelled to North Shields to collect a cheque for £350 for our youth work from Guest of Honour, Rob Andrew.

We were also delighted to receive a cheque for £1,060 from the Local Network Fund for the under-16's five-a-side football team we are planning to launch in September.

As we give God our grateful thanks for these awards, continue to pray that grants will be forthcoming for the next phase of our building refurbishment work, which has been costed at just over £30,000.

David Hunt

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