

FORMED FOR GOD'S FAMILY

A sermon by Lay Pastor Mr. John Macmillan of the George Town charge, as part of the charge's 40 Days of Purpose Programme, and based on:

The Purpose Driven Life - Part 3

Rick Warren

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Sermon Outline Notes

"God is the one who made all things, and all things are for His glory. He wanted to have many children share His glory..."

Heb. 2:10a (NCV)

"His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ."

Eph. 1:5 (NLT)

"Love your spiritual family!"

1 Pet. 2:17b (Msg)

MY 2nd PURPOSE IN LIFE IS **FELLOWSHIP.**

"The person who loves God must also love other believers."

1 John 4:21 (GW)

FELLOWSHIP is **loving God's Family.**

"I'm writing... so you'll know how to live in the family of God. That family is the church..."

1 Tim. 3:14-15 (NCV)

FOUR LEVELS OF FELLOWSHIP

LEVEL 1: MEMBERSHIP: **CHOOSING TO BELONG**

"...You are members of God's very own family... and you belong in God's household with every other Christian." Eph. 2:19 (LB)

"In Christ we who are many form one Body, and each member belongs to all the others." Rom. 12:5 (NIV)

"This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized. Each of us is now a part of His resurrection Body." 1 Cor. 12:13 (Msg)

"That's what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus." Rom. 6:3 (Msg)

LEVEL 2: FRIENDSHIP: LEARNING TO SHARE

"All the believers met together constantly and shared everything with each other." Acts 2:44 (LB)

- OUR EXPERIENCES

"People learn from one another, just as iron sharpens iron." Prov. 27:17 (TEV)

- OUR HOMES

"Open your homes to each other." 1 Peter 4:9 (NCV)

- OUR PROBLEMS

"Share each other's troubles and problems." Gal. 6:2 (NLT)

"Let us not give up the habit of meeting together. Instead, let us encourage one another..." Heb. 10:25 (TEV)

LEVEL 3: PARTNERSHIP: DOING MY PART

"We are partners working together for God." 1 Cor. 3:9a (TEV)

"The whole Body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole Body is healthy and growing and full of love." Eph. 4:16 (NLT)

"Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to Me." Matt. 25:40 (NRSV)

LEVEL 4: KINSHIP: **LOVING BELIEVERS LIKE FAMILY**

"...they were like family to each other." Acts 2:42a (CEV)

"Be devoted to each other like a loving family." Rom. 12:10 (GW)

"We know what real love is because Christ gave up His life for us. And so we also ought to give up our lives for our Christian brothers and sisters." 1 John 3:16 (NLT)

"Your strong love for each other will prove to the world that you are My disciples." John 13:35 (LB)

"You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus." Gal. 3:26 (NLT)

Sermon Transcript

We're continuing in our series on 40 Days of Purpose, this being our third. Rick Warren, designer of this series tells of Adelina Dominguez who died in San Diego recently. Now, what made her death noteworthy is that according to the Guinness Book of Records, she was the oldest living American. At 114 years of age, she outlived all of her children and some of her grandchildren. When she was asked the secret of her longevity, Associated Press reports she gave all the credit to God and to His plan and purpose for her life, "I knew God had a purpose for my life."

Precisely what we are looking at "God's purpose for your life". Last week, we looked at His first purpose, which is getting to know Him and love Him; offering yourself to God. The Bible calls that worship because you were planned for God's pleasure. Today, we are looking at the second purpose; you are formed for God's family. Look at the verse at the top of your outline, would you read it with me. "*God is the one who made all things, and all things are for His glory. He wanted to have many children share His glory.*" God wanted a family and that's why we're here. The Bible says He planned everything in the entire universe so we could be born, and share in His glory; we could be part of His family. Look at the next verse on your paper. "*His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ.*" The entire Bible, is the story of God building a family. It's called History His-story, because God is building a family for Himself that is going to last not just here on earth, but forever and ever and ever in eternity. It is an eternal family. You were made to last forever.

Once you understand and get started on God's first purpose for your life,

getting to know and to love God, He wants you to begin to focus and start practicing on the second. Please read it with me. "*Love your spiritual family.*" That's what God wants you to do. God says I want you to learn to love the people in your family and there are several reasons. First, your physical family will eventually fall apart, in fact, many fall apart here on earth. But your spiritual family will last forever and ever and ever. So you will spend more time with your spiritual family than you do with your physical family. God wants you to learn to love them and the He has 3 reasons for this.

First, it makes us more like God, because God is love. Secondly, He wants His children to learn to get along together. Are any of you parents? I am sure you would want your kids to get along with each other. And thirdly, it's practice for eternity. One of the things you will do in heaven, in eternity, is love God. And the other thing you will do is love the other believers that are there. It is a place of love. So God says, "I want you to practice now learning to love other believers." So would you write this down, "My second purpose in life is **Fellowship.**" That's the word that the Bible uses to describe loving each other. Now, again, this word, like the word we looked at last week, Worship, is often misunderstood. I mean, if I were to go out and ask people on the street, "What do you think of when I say the word 'fellowship'?", some would say a casual conversation, some would say eating out together, some might say going to church. Let me give you an example: See Dwight over there—I spoke a few words to him before we started, and I will probably shake his hand when he is about to leave. Can you imagine me saying to him, have a good week Dwight, it was so nice to fellowship with you today.

Did we fellowship? No! We just talked. That's not fellowship. Write this down, "Fellowship is **loving God's family.**" The Bible says, please read with me: "*The person who loves God must also love other believers.*" We must love other believers. How do you do that? The Bible gives us crystal clear instructions. Paul wrote "*I'm writing so that you'll know how to live in the family of God. That family is the church.*" Would you circle the word "*family*" and circle the word "*church*," and draw a line joining them-- because the church is a family. It is not a building, an institution, an organization; it is not a club. It is a family. A lot of people say, "Well, I'm going to go to church," as if church is a place you go to. Church is a family you belong to. Big difference. It's more than a building, more than a service. It is family that we are to belong to. In God's family there are four levels of fellowship. It is the second purpose of your life and it is impossible to fulfill all the other purposes God has for your life without fellowship. You were not meant to be here on earth

alone, to go through life on your own. The fact is we need each other.

Of the four levels of Fellowship, the first level is Membership. Please write this in "**Choosing to belong,**" making the choice to belong. That's the most basic level. That means you find a church family and you choose to get connected to it. Look at what the Bible has to say; would you read this verse with me? "*You are members of God's very own family and you belong in God's household with every other Christian.*" You belong. The Christian life is not just a matter of believing. It is matter of belonging, and you and I must choose to belong. Fellowship begins with belonging, with making that choice. God wants you to make the choice to be a part of His family. When you were born, you automatically became a part of the human race, but you have to choose to belong to the family of God, the church. It is a membership choice.

You hear some people say, "Well, I'm a Christian, but I don't want to belong to any church." That just doesn't make sense. The church is where you live out what it means to be a Christian. That's like saying, "I'm a football player, but I don't want to be a part of any team." It doesn't work. A Christian without a church family is an orphan. God meant us to be a part of a family.

This next week in the Purpose Driven Life book, we're going to be reading together six reasons why you need to be a part of a church family, why it meets your needs and why you meet other people's needs. The Bible tells us this, please read with me "*In Christ we who are many form one Body, and each member belongs to all the others.*" In this decision that we make, you belong to every other Christian. We are members together. Now, I know the word "membership," is a funny word to some of us. But did you know that this word originally was a Christian word? It came right out of these verses in the Bible. I know that today it is used for being a member of every kind of club and signing up for this and joining that. But originally, the meaning was right here in the Bible; a member of the Body of Christ. Just like your hand is a member of your body, that's how tightly we're tied to each other. This is about belonging to each other, making the choice to belong to a family.

Rick Warren states that he has come across what he calls floating believers, people who go from church to church to church. One week, I'm a part of this church and the next week – they are doing something hot over there and the next over there. If you want to grow, if you want to see God at work in your life, you have got to join a body. We need to attach ourselves to a group of believers, where we say, "I want

to be a part of what's going on there." Jesus loves the church; you and I need to have the same kind of love. Jesus calls the church the "body." We need to have that same kind of respect for it, to recognize what it means. What if I said to you, "You know, I love you, I just can't stand your body". How would you feel about that? The church is Jesus' body. He loves the church. The church is the bride of Christ. What if I said, "I love you, but I can't stand your wife," how would you like that?

The church is the bride of Christ. And because Jesus loves the church, this group of believers together that are growing together, you and I need to have that same kind of love for this body by deciding, choosing to belong. There is a symbol of that, of the fact that we belong together -- a picture that God gives us. It is called "baptism." Baptism is the picture that we belong together in the body of Christ. Look at this passage, please read with me. *"This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized. Each of us is now a part of His resurrection Body."* It is a public way of saying, "I am part of a group of believers and I am excited to belong to this group of believers." *"That's what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus."* So baptism is a public way of saying together we're proclaiming we died to something; we live to something. We died to an old way of life; we're living to a new way of life.

I guess the best picture I can give you is like the wedding ring of the Christian life. This wedding ring that I am wearing doesn't make me married. But Janet, my wife, gave it to me on the day we were married so I could wear it from that day forward as a visible symbol of a commitment of my heart. That's what baptism is. It is visible symbol of the commitment of a person's heart, saying I'm not ashamed to tell the world that I believe in Jesus Christ.

The first level is choosing to belong. Second level of Fellowship is a little bit deeper, when you go a little further into the family of God, and this is learning to share. This is "the friendship level." **Learning to share.** You see, you were created in God's image. The Bible says, *"It is not good for man to be alone."* In other words, we were made for each other. Life is not a solo act. And you need friends. The Bible says *"All the believers met together constantly and shared everything with each other."* Circle "met together," and circle "shared." Notice two things: one, you can't develop friendships without meeting together; and two; you can't develop friendships without sharing. Now, the more frequently

you meet together, the closer you will get. Do you ever see some people that have really deep friendships; they have long-term friendships, 20, 30, 40 years. You're a little envious. How lucky they are to have a deep friend like that. I say to you, it is not luck at all. It is a choice. You choose to develop friendships by making time for them. Do you know why most people are lonely? They don't make time for friendships. They are too busy achieving; they are too busy working; they are too busy doing other things. They are not willing to put the time into it. You have to meet together. You have to get together, until you start saying this is going to be a priority in my life, you're not going to develop any deep friends. They don't just happen. They happen because you choose to make the time for them. It is not luck. It is a choice. And you can't develop friendships without sharing. It says, "*they shared everything.*"

Those of you who are parents know one of the fundamental lessons children have to learn is learning to share. Every little child has to learn to share. And God says "You know what? In the family of God I want you to learn to share with other believers." So what are we supposed to share? Well, the Bible is full of instructions on things we're to share as Christians with each other. Let me just mention three. Number 1, the Bible says we're to share our **Experiences**. The Bible says people learn from one other "just as iron sharpens iron." Have you ever heard of that phrase "it's wise to learn from experience?" Well, it is wise to learn from the experiences of other people, because you don't have time to make all the mistakes yourself. If everything you learn in life you learn personally by trial and error, you will go through a lot of problems unnecessarily and by the time you figure it all out, you're dead. You don't have enough time to learn everything on your own. So God says you can short-circuit and learn a lot quicker if you learn from the experiences of others. Nobody knows everything. You see, we're all ignorant, just on different subjects. You know some things I don't know and I know some things you don't know. And the person next to you knows some things neither of us knows. And the Bible says that you can learn from anybody if you just learn to ask the right questions. So we're to share our experience with others. Think of all the wealth of knowledge sitting here right now in this church family in this service, and how much we could learn from each other if we just spend the time to get together.

Second, the Bible says we're to share our **homes**. The Bible says "*open up your homes to each other.*" It doesn't say if they are really nice ones, open them up. It just says open them up. They don't have to be really nice. It just says open up your home. Why does God say that?

Why are we to share our homes? I'll tell you why – because you cannot fellowship in a crowd. You can only fellowship in a small group. We will not do any fellowshiping here today. It is impossible to fellowship with this many people. We can worship together, celebrate together, learn together. But no fellowship will take place in this service. You will walk out of here not knowing anybody better than you do right now. Fellowship only takes place in the small group. And that's why the Bible says open up your homes to each other. That's where you really get to know people. Did you know in the first 300 years of Christianity, there were no church buildings? All church meetings were held in homes. There were no buildings. And that, by the way, was the fastest period of growth for the church. One of the reasons we keep saying, "Go get in a small group" is because that's a Biblical principle. Christians are supposed to meet in homes. How many of you are in a 40 Days of Purpose group? Can I see your hands? That's the church in action. The church distributed. Let's be a little honest. How many of you would say, "The first time I ever went to a small group, I was a little nervous"? Can I see your hand? because you didn't know what was going on, you had all kinds of fears. A group I'd like to honor today, because they really moved against their fear and exhibited courage, are the hosts that opened up their homes for all of us. If you're a host, would you stand up and let us just appreciate you right now, because you're opening your home? Congratulations! Thanks

The Bible says we need to learn to share. And where do we learn to share? Not in a big group like this, but in a small group. That's why you are really not going to feel a part of this family until you get in a group.

Now, not only do we share our experiences in our homes, the Bible says, number three, we're to share our **problems**. We're not meant to face our problems alone. The Bible says, "Share each other's troubles and problems." When you share a joy, it is doubled; and when you share a problem, it is cut in half? The Bible says, "*Weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.*" Sometimes in a small group you die of laughter and sometimes you're all shedding a tear. Why? Depends on what is going on in your group during the week. You don't have to fix everybody's problem. God hasn't told you to do that. It just says share them. This means lend a listening ear. You don't have to fix. In fact, a lot of times, trying to fix a problem doesn't help. It's just sitting there and sharing sympathy and experience.

Now, you're never going to go to this second level of fellowship until you

get into a small group. That's why the Bible says this 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 group is to encourage each other. And it says, "Don't give up the habit." I hope you'll never give up this habit some of you are starting for the first time. Now, some of you tried a group and to be honest with you, you didn't feel like you really fit. So what do you do? Just try another one! Don't give up. It is not like we have a limited number of choices here. We have about 30 groups going and so if you don't fit, try another. Don't give up. Did you marry the first person you dated? I doubt it. So, if you got in a group and say, "I don't fit with these people," that's okay. You just need to find the right place. If you're still not in a group, it is not too late yet.

The third level is Partnership. Partnership is **doing my part**. Partnership is realizing that I've got a contribution to make; that the family of God needs you. Listen, God did not bring you Elmslie to sit and soak in some spiritual spa. That's not why you're here. He brought you here to serve. He wants to make a difference through your life. In every family there are family responsibilities. You divide up the chores, as you do your part. This is a Christian family, God's family. And every one of us has a part. The Bible is filled with the fact that you and I are to work with one another in getting this job done. There are 58 times in the New Testament where the Bible says we do it with one another. We serve one another. We love one another. We pray with one another. The Bible even says we have to put up with one another when we're doing all of this. That's how it works together. This is love in action. Not just in words. It is great to share your heart, that's level two. But it is even greater to do your part. That is what level three is all about.

Listen to what the Bible has to say -- in fact, would you read together with me this verse. "*We are partners working together for God.*" Circle the word "*partners.*" Paul once wrote to some people and said "*we're partners spreading the good news of Christ everywhere.*" In Greek, the language the New Testament was originally written in, the word "fellowship" is often translated "partnership." That's how close these two words are. You ever want to be part of a great team, something that just did something great? Some of you maybe had a dream of being a part of a team that went to the super bowl or won the World Series, the Ashes, or maybe the Stanley cup if you are into hockey. You're part of the greatest team there ever was in the church. What we do is going to last forever. Ever want to be a partner in a great business that went to the top of the Fortune 500? In the church, we are part of the greatest

enterprise that's ever existed. We get to be part of God's plan for the universe. That's what it is all about, when we cooperate and participate together in the family of God.

But in order to be a part, you've got to find your niche, you have got to find out, "Where do I fit, how I do I fit?" The Bible tells us we all have a niche. "*The whole body is fitted together perfectly.*" This is God's job; he does this. "...*As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole Body is healthy and growing and full of love.*" You might circle those words "each part." That's you, that's me. We are a part of God's body. And it is working together that we get things done. You have a part to play in the Body of Christ. And when we cooperate, we get more done together than we could ever get done by ourselves. There is an attitude, a key, to me, to you, to all of us, that we're doing it for Jesus Christ.

Mother Teresa spent her life working, as many of you know, with the poorest of the poor in Calcutta, India. She was once asked, "How do you handle all the death and disease on a daily basis? How do you do the tough things when it comes to serving?" And her answer was, "Every person I bathe, every person I bandage, I imagine seeing the face of Jesus and I do it for Him." That's the attitude that's behind this. It's the attitude of, "*Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are the members of my family, you did it to Me.*" So I encourage you to make this a practical action step this week, if you want to experience a deeper level of fellowship. Look for a practical need in your group to meet this next week, just some practical thing, and watch what it does for your relationship, for your fellowship with one another.

Now, the deepest level of fellowship in the family of God is what is called "Kinship." Now, kinship is an old term. We don't use it much anymore. Kinship literally means your closest relationships. It means your closest family. When somebody has an accident, they say, "Notify the next-of-kin", and they don't mean go find Aunt Ethyl. They mean you find the person they care about most, the person who is closest to them, the one they hold most dearly, you get the person that matters most to them, and you bring them here right now because they are kin. And the Bible says that's the kind of attitude we should have.

That kinship -- you might write this down -- the deepest level, is **loving believers like family**; treating and loving believers like they're family. You're completely committed to them. The Bible says "*They were like family to each other.*" God says "Well, we're not just like a family; we are a family." The Bible says, "*Be devoted to each other like a loving family.*" Now, the word for fellowship in the Bible is the Greek word

"koinonia." And the basic root literally means being as committed to each other as we are to Jesus Christ; that is the deepest level of fellowship. Being as committed to each other as we are to Jesus Christ. That is family relationship. That is kinship. That is saying I'm at the level of being willing to sacrifice for you. You see, many know John 3:16, "*God so loved the world,*" but don't know *First John 3:16*. That one is just as important as John 3:16. It says this there on your outline, "*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; sacrificing for each other. It's the kind of love Jesus Christ had for you. He died for you.

Now, in the Bible it talks about the fellowship of suffering. And, truthfully, in Cayman, Christians know little about this level of fellowship. Overseas a lot of them do, because they are being persecuted. Did you know that all around the world, millions of Christians each year lose their lives just for being believers? Over ten million Christians die every year, mostly in either communist or Muslim countries, simply for being Christians. And so we come to this verse, and people in other places can take it literally. They are literally laying down their lives. "I'll take a bullet for you. I'm going to protect you." They are laying down their lives for each other, as brothers and sisters in the family of God. Now, we're not persecuted like that here, so it is hard for us to experience this deepest level of fellowship where you're actually giving your life for a brother or sister in the family of God.

So how do you do that? How do you get to this deepest level? Well, you do it by standing with other believers when they are going through a crisis. When everybody else walks out, you walk in; you're there for them in the tough times.

Friends, this is what life is all about, loving God and learning to love each other. If you miss this, you have missed the purpose of your life. Life is not about accomplishments, it is about relationships. You were put on this earth to know God and love Him, and to know His family and love them, because that's whom we're spending eternity with. I have been at the bedside of people as they were dying. In all of those situations where I've been at their side as people were taking their last breath, I have never once had anybody say, "Bring me my diplomas. I want them close to me." Nobody says, "Bring me my trophies." Nobody says, "Bring

me the gold watch I got at retirement." Nobody says, "Bring me my palm pilot." It is in those final moments that they talk about what matters most, and they say, "Bring me my family and friends." One day, you're going to figure out that what really matters in life is knowing God and having close family and friends. I hope it doesn't take that long. I hope you don't discover that at the last moment of your life. I hope you discover it now and begin to fellowship as God intended for us, because life is all about love.

Loving God, that's called "Worship," and loving each other, that's called "Fellowship." Jesus said, *"Your strong love for each other will prove to the world that you are my disciples."* It wasn't too long after Jesus said this that the Roman Empire was throwing Christians to the lions in coliseums. They weren't very hospitable to Christians for several hundred years. They were putting them up on stakes and burning them and they were crucifying them and throwing them to lions and all other kinds of things. And in that period of time, one of the most famous secular historians, not a Christian, wrote this about Christians: "Behold, how they love each other." You see, what we want at Church to be known for is not our size, not our sermons, not our singing, not our strategy, not our buildings, but our love. We want people to say, "That's the place where they love each other," because that's what Christianity is all about, loving God and loving each other. When people find a church, a place, where there is genuine love, you 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.

How do you know if you're in God's family? How do you know personally? Let me read you three verses that will test if you're really a Christian or not. Listen to this, right from the Bible. 1 John 3:10, *"Anyone who does not love other Christians does not belong to God."* That's the Bible. 1 John 4:20, *"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, *"But if we love our Christian brothers, it proves that we have passed from death to eternal life."* That's the proof.

The greatest privilege you will ever be offered in life is a privilege of being a part of God's family. You see, God's family is a laboratory for learning to love. Some of you grew up in homes that didn't have a lot of love. And, honestly, you don't know how to love. The only love most people know how to do is sexual love, romantic love. They don't know any other kind of love. So we have to be taught, and the church (the

family of God) is where you learn to love real people, not ideal people. Nobody in your small group is ideal and neither are you. We learn to love real people, and that's what God put us on earth to do.

So let me ask you a couple relevant questions: which of these levels of fellowship are you at? Have you even made it to the first one, choosing to belong? Are you still floating around from church to church to church and attend here and attend there? You've never gotten committed. You've never gotten into membership. You need to choose a church. You need to be baptized and say, "I'm not ashamed." That's the most basic level. If you haven't done that, that's your next step.

Then you need to learn to share. And where do you do that? In a small group. You don't learn to share in a place like this. Then you need to not just share your heart, you need to do your part. That's partnership. Find your niche. Find your place to give back, to make a contribution. If you're in the family of God, you have some family responsibilities. God expects you to do your part in the family. You don't just slide along while everybody else does theirs.

Then you move to this deepest level. Are there any other believers that know you are devoted to them? That you're going to be there for them in their crisis? Even more basic question is, are you a part of the family of God? You say, "Well, isn't everybody a part of the family of God?" No. Everybody is created by God, but not everybody is a child of God. You have to choose to be a part of God's family. God gave us one condition, the last verse on your outline. "*You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*" You can do that today.

Let's bow our heads.

You know, Father, next to salvation, the greatest gift you have ever given us is the opportunity to be a part of your family. Thank you that we don't have to go through life disconnected and isolated. Now, you pray. Say, "Dear God, I want to be a part of your family and I want to learn to love my spiritual family just like you do. Forgive me for taking it casually. I want to grow in the levels of fellowship, so today I'm choosing to belong. I'm not going to float around anymore. I want to learn to share and make time to develop real friendships. I want to do my part in the family of God. I want to learn to love other believers like brothers and sisters. Teach me the meaning of real love. In your name I pray, Amen."
