

MASTERPLAN ONE

GOD'S PURPOSES ON THE EARTH

When you get to the end of your life and look back, what things do you think will seem most important?

If we're to live a life of significance, purpose, joy and hope then we need to align our life with God's purposes in creation. This is not just a matter of understanding a set of theological ideas, it's a deeply practical question of how we will invest the time and resources God has entrusted to us. In these studies we'll consider God's purposes in the Earth and our part in them.

The story of the Bible is that God has created the world to reflect his glory, love and goodness. He intends that we should share in his life, purposes and heart. However, the whole creation been broken because humanity rebelled against our maker and embraced evil. God's purposes still stand and he's rescuing a people to be with him forever and through whom he can bless and reach out to the world. Ultimately Jesus will come back and banish sin, evil and death forever.

First read through the passage from 2 PETER 3 (skipping over the verses from Matthew). Then go through the passages one paragraph at a time answering the questions that go with each section:

2 PETER 3:1 Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles.

3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water.

Verses 1-2

What is Peter's purpose in writing this letter?
How does he explain what this means?

Verses 3-5

In what ways is this attitude reflected in our culture today?
What do we learn about the nature of unbelief?
What do you make of this in your experience?

6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men

MATTHEW 24 v 37 - 39: As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

Verses 6-7

What Old Testament story is the backdrop of this passage?

Read Matthew 24v37-39

How is the account of Noah and the flood a picture of our times?

How do v6-7 and these verses from Matthew expand our understanding of v1-2?

What does "ungodly" mean?

What event does Peter want us to keep in mind?

Verses 8-10

What do we learn about God's timing?

Why is God delaying the end of history?

What do we learn about God's heart?

How does this affect how we think of him and of people who don't know him?

What do we learn about the return of Jesus?

Verses 11-13

Why is the question in v11 so important?

What would a holy, godly life look like?

How can we speed his coming?

What is our destiny and how does this verse further expand on v1-2?

What has most stood out to you from this study?

If you were Noah, how would you have set your priorities? What does this mean for us today?

How would you summarise Peter's message in your own words?

What practical responses can you make to what we've considered in this study?

MASTERPLAN TWO OUR PART IN GOD'S PURPOSES

What did we learn of God's purposes in the Earth from the first study?

God hasn't created us to get on with our lives, wrapped up in our own concerns and priorities. He's created us to share in his life, his purposes and his heart. He wants us to be involved in his great plan of blessing the nations by introducing people to Jesus and offering them his forgiveness and new life.

Forgiveness of sin and new life was made possible solely through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, we're called to be his ambassadors, demonstrating his loving rule and announcing his offer of forgiveness and new life to everyone everywhere. Understanding what God's responsible for and what he's called us to be keeps us from trying to play God or failing to be all that he's called us to be.

Read through the passages from Matthew 28 and 2 Corinthians 5. Then go through the verses one paragraph at a time answering the questions that go with each section.

MATTHEW 28v16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

2 CORINTHIANS 5v9 ... we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Matthew 28v16-20

Why does Matthew record the disciples worship, obedience and doubts in the same passage?

What is a disciple and what does it mean to make disciples?

What's the difference between 'teaching' and 'teaching to obey'?

What's the scope of Jesus instruction and what's God's promise?

Is this command for us today? Why?

2 Corinthians 5v9-10

What motivates Paul's life and ministry?

How do you relate to these motivations?

This is what it means to live with an eternal perspective.

11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you...

14 ...For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Verses 11-13

Why does Paul tell others? What does this mean?

Paul was coming under pressure and accusation from false teachers who were trying to undermine and usurp him and exploit the Corinthians. What do we learn about the manner of Paul's ministry to the Corinthians?

Verses 14-16

What does it mean to be compelled by Christ's love? Can you relate to this?

How is ministry related to the death and resurrection of Jesus?

What does it mean to regard people from a worldly point of view? How do we do this?

Verse 17

What does it mean to be a new creation in Christ?

Verses 18-20

What is "the ministry of reconciliation" and "message of reconciliation?"

What does it mean to be an ambassador?

What does it mean for Christ to make his appeal through us? How do you feel about this? What privileges and responsibilities does this entail?

Verse 21

How would you put Paul's summary of the gospel in your own words?

What has stood out to you from this study?

What does the Great Commission (Matthew 28v16-20) require of us?

How would you summarise our part in God's purposes?

In what ways does your life currently reflect God's desire for us to be involved in his purposes?

What practical responses can we make to what we've looked at in this study?

In this study we've looked at our part in God's purposes. However, the Bible does not leave us in the dark about how practically to obey God. In the next study we'll consider the strategy the Bible gives us to fulfil our part in God's purposes.

MASTERPLAN THREE

GOD'S STRATEGY TO REACH EVERYONE

From the previous studies, what were God's purposes in the Earth and what was our part in them?

For some, having a strategy for being involved in God's purposes feels very unspiritual. However, if we're to obey the Great Commission we must think practically because obedience is relentlessly practical. God has given us a clear strategy in the Bible which both Jesus and the apostles followed. Strategy without authentic spiritual life is dead. But to not be practical about how we will obey God is spiritualised disobedience. To not obey God is to miss out on sharing in his heart and purposes and to waste our life.

Read through the passages from 1 THESSALONIANS and 2 TIMOTHY and then reread them a paragraph at a time discussing the questions as you go:

I THESSALONIANS 1v1 Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

5b You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, your faith in God has become known everywhere

Verses 1-3

What were the foundations of the church?

What do we learn about Paul's ministry?

What motivated the believer's service?

How did these motivations affect what they did?

Verses 4-5a

What are the authenticating marks of new life?

Authentic, vital spiritual life is the basis of our involvement in God's purposes.

Verses 5b-8a

How did Paul make disciples?

How many generations of influence are recorded?

Why did the church have such a big impact?

Paul poured his life into the believers in the city. They in turn did the same for the other believers in the region and this mobilised enough people to get the gospel to everyone.

8b Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Verses 8b-10

What marked the believers?

To be an ambassador for Christ, it's not enough to just live the life or just proclaim the gospel. We have to do both together.

The church in Thessalonica is a good example of spiritual multiplication. Addition is where we introduce people to Christ one at a time. If you were to lead a thousand people to Christ every day it would take 16500 years to reach the whole world. If the world population doubled in that time, so would the time taken to reach everyone.

Multiplication is where we introduce someone to Christ (win), then teach them to follow Jesus moment by moment as a way of life (build) and equip them to do with others what we've done with them (send). If we spent a year focussing on winning, building and sending three people and at the end of the year, all of us did the same with three more people then there would be four of us multiplying. If we replicated this pattern of winning, building and sending every year we would reach and disciple the world in 17 years. If the population doubled in that time it would take an extra year to reach everyone. It's this principle of multiplication that allowed Paul's involvement in Thessalonica, starting with no believers at all, to have a huge impact that reached a whole region. The same principle can be seen in 2 TIMOTHY:

2 TIMOTHY 2v1

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

How many generations of disciples can be seen in this example?

What instructions do we have about who to invest in?

In the strategy of spiritual multiplication, the 4th Generation of disciples is very significant. I can invest in a few people and help each of them to reach a few others and this would reach three generations. However, the ministry could still be dependent on me. In order to get to the fourth generation, the second generation (i.e. those I'm directly investing in) have to fully embrace the vision of multiplication and be equipped and intentional about what they're doing.

When this happens, I'm not simply teaching people to use tools to help them make disciples. Multiplication is in the genes of what's being passed on. I'm multiplying people who are fully aware of what I'm doing and are learning to do the same. The impact is no longer dependent on me but has been set free to become a movement that can have an impact far beyond my sphere. A multitude of people are being developed who are envisioned and equipped to change the world. This is what happened with Jesus and his 12 disciples and with Paul in as we saw above.

Critical to this kind of exponential growth is that the way we make disciples is transferable. In other words, what we do with people is very simple so that it can easily be passed on. If what we do is too “clever”, then people will not feel confident to copy what we’re doing. As we saw with Paul, he modelled a life to those he knew and invited them to imitate him. These people became a model to others and so on and the results were explosive. Clear strategy can never substitute for authentic spiritual life, but spiritual life with clear strategy can change the world!

What are your reflections on what we’ve looked at in this study?

Would you like to be involved in spiritual multiplication? Why or why not?

What experience have you had of others investing in your life?

What would be involved practically in you being involved in multiplying to and through others?

In what areas would you need to grow if you were to be a model that others could imitate?

Who has God brought into your life that you could begin to help follow Jesus?

The world around us is dying. God is rescuing and transforming a people who will be with him forever and through whom he can bless the world. The division between those who are part of God’s new creation and those who will face eternal judgement is the gospel of Jesus Christ. We’re commissioned to bless the world by announcing and demonstrating the saving message of death and resurrection of Jesus.

There’s no other hope for our world than the gospel with which we’ve been entrusted. In these studies we’ve sought to clarify what God is doing in the world and how he wants us to be involved. We’re not simply invited to understand this, but to enter into the purpose and heart of God by obeying his commission to make disciples. Will he find in us willing hearts and obedient lives?