

THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE

WHAT ON EARTH AM I HERE FOR?

Rick Warren

Transformed by Trouble

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 2 CORINTHIANS 4:17 (NIV)

It is the fire of suffering that brings forth the gold of godliness.

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GOD HAS A PURPOSE BEHIND EVERY PROBLEM.

He uses circumstances to develop our character. In fact, he depends more on circumstances to make us like Jesus than he depends on our reading the Bible. The reason is obvious: You face circumstances twenty-four hours a day.

Jesus warned us that we would have problems in the world. No one is immune to pain or insulated from suffering, and no one gets to skate through life problem-free. Life is a series of problems. Every time you solve one, another is waiting to take its place. Not all of them are big, but all are significant in God's growth process for you. Peter assures us that problems are normal, saying, "*Don't be bewildered or surprised when you go through the fiery trials ahead, for this is no strange, unusual thing that is going to happen to you.*" **1 Peter 4:12**

God uses problems to draw you closer to himself. The Bible says, "*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those who are crushed in spirit.*" **Psalm 34:18** Your most profound and intimate experiences of worship will likely be in your darkest days – when your heart is broken, when you feel abandoned, when you're out of options, when the pain is great – and you turn to God alone. It is during suffering that we learn to pray our most authentic, heartfelt, honest-to-God prayers. When we're in pain, we don't have the energy for superficial prayers.

Joni Eareckson Tada notes, "When life is rosy, we may slide by with knowing about Jesus, with imitating him and quoting him and speaking of him. But only in suffering will we *know Jesus.*" We learn things about God in suffering that we can't learn any other way.

God could have kept Joseph out of jail, kept Daniel out of the lion's den, kept Jeremiah from being tossed into a slimy pit, kept Paul from being shipwrecked three times, and kept the three Hebrew young men from being thrown into the blazing furnace – but he didn't. He let those problems happen, and every one of those persons was drawn closer to God as a result.

(1)

Problems force us to look to God and depend on him instead of ourselves. Paul testified to this benefit: *“We felt we were doomed to die and saw how powerless we were to help ourselves; but that was good, for then we put everything into the hands of God, who alone could save us.”* **Heb. 2:9 NIV** You will never know that God is all you need until God is all you’ve got.

How are you handling your trouble?

Romans 8:28-29: *“We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son.”*

Understanding Romans 8:28-29

We live in a fallen world. Only in heaven is everything done perfectly the way God intends. That is why we are told to pray, *“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”* **Matt. 6:10** To fully understand **Romans 8:28-29** you must consider it phrase by phrase.

“We know”: Our hope in difficult times is not based on positive thinking, wishful thinking, or natural optimism. It is a certainty based on the truths that God is in complete control of our universe and that he loves us.

“that God causes”: There’s a Grand Designer behind everything. Your life is not a result of random chance, fate, or luck. There is a master plan. God *cannot* make a mistake – because he is God.

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“everything”: God’s plan for your life involves *all* that happens to you - including your mistakes, your sins, and your hurts. It includes illness, debt, disasters, divorce, and death of loved ones. God can bring good out of the worst evil. He did at Calvary.

“to work together”: Not separately or independently. The events in your life work *together* in God’s plan. They are not isolated acts, but interdependent parts of the process to make you like Christ.

“for the good”: This does not say that everything in life is good. Much of what happens in our world is evil and bad, but God specializes in bringing good out of it. In the official family tree of Jesus Christ, four women are listed: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Tamar seduced her father-in-law to get pregnant. Rahab was a prostitute. Ruth was not even Jewish and broke the law by marrying a Jewish man. Bathsheba committed adultery with David, which resulted in her husband’s murder. These were not exactly sterling reputations, but God brought good out of bad, and Jesus came through their lineage. God’s purpose is greater than our problems, our pain, and even our sin.

“of those who love God and are called”: This promise is only for God’s children. It is not for everyone. All things work *for bad* for those living in opposition to God who insist on having their own way.

“according to his purpose”: What is that purpose? It is that we **“become like his Son.”** Everything God allows to happen in your life is permitted for that purpose.

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Building Christlike Character

What happens outwardly in your life is not as important as what happens *inside* you. Your circumstances are temporary, but your character will last forever.

Since God intends to make you like Jesus, he will take you through the same experiences Jesus went through. That includes loneliness, temptation, stress, criticism, rejection, and many other problems. The Bible says Jesus “*learned obedience through suffering*” and “*was made perfect through suffering.*” **Heb. 5:8** Why would God exempt us from what he allowed his own Son to experience?

How is God shaping your character?

Responding to Problems as Jesus Would

Problems don't automatically produce what God intends. Many people become bitter, rather than better, and never grow up. You have to respond the way Jesus would.

Remember that God's plan is good. God knows what is best for you and has your best interests at heart. God told Jeremiah, “*The plans I have for you [are] plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*” **Jer. 29:11** Joseph understood this truth when he told his brothers who had sold him into slavery, “*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for*

good.” Genesis **50:20** Whenever God says no to your request for relief, remember, *“God is doing what is best for us, training us to live God’s holy best.”*

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It is vital that you stay focused on God’s plan, not your pain or problem.

That is how Jesus endured the pain of the cross, and we are urged to follow his example: *“Keep your eyes on Jesus, our leader and instructor. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterwards.”* **Heb. 2:2 NLB**

The secret of endurance is to remember that your pain is temporary but your reward will be eternal.

Don’t give in to short-term thinking. Stay focused on the end result: *“If we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. What we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will give us later.”* **Rom. 8:17**

Rejoice and give thanks. The Bible tells us to *“give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”* **1 Thes. 5:18 NIV** How is this possible? Notice that God tells us to give thanks *“in all circumstances”* not *for all circumstances.* God doesn’t expect you to be thankful *for evil, for sin, for suffering, or for their painful consequences in the world.* Instead, God wants you to thank him that he will use your problems to fulfill his purposes.

We can also rejoice in knowing that God is going through the pain with us. Instead, he enters into our suffering. Jesus did it in the Incarnation, and his Spirit does it in us now. God will never leave us on our own.

Refuse to give up.

Character building is a slow process. Whenever we try to avoid or escape the difficulties in life, we short-circuit the process, delay our growth, and actually

end up with a worse kind of pain – the worthless type that accompanies denial and avoidance.

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You know you are maturing when you begin to see the hand of God in the random, baffling, and seemingly pointless circumstances of life.

If you are facing trouble right now, don't ask, "Why me?" Instead ask, "What do you want me to learn?" Then trust God and keep on doing what's right. *"You need to stick it out, staying with God's plan so you'll be there for the promised completion."* **Heb. 10:36 MSG** Don't give up – grow up!

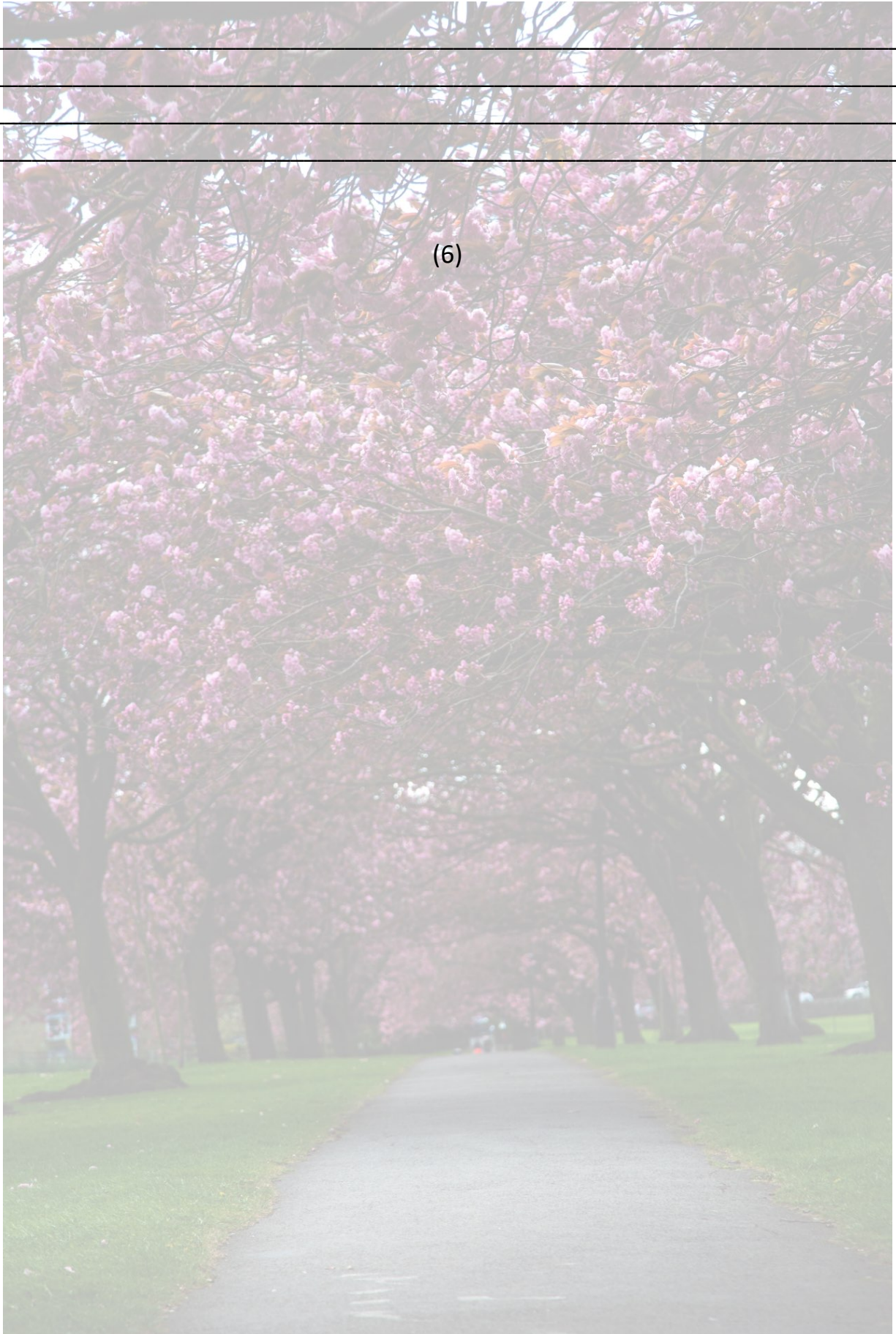
Thinking about My Purpose

POINT TO PONDER: There is a purpose behind every problem.

VERSE TO REMEMBER: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* **Romans 8:28 (NIV)**

QUESTION TO CONSIDER: What problem in my life caused the greatest growth in me?

MESSAGE TO HEAR: www.purposedriven.com/day25



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