



In his book *Loving God* Chuck Colson makes the following observations about life and the purpose of it. “For generations, Western society has been obsessed with the search for self. We’ve turned the age-old philosophical question about the meaning and purpose of life into a modern growth industry.” He says that people look to find purpose in life through things like yoga, a blending of world religions, self-help books, sexual experimentation, early retirement, extreme sports, technological advancements, get-rich-quick strategies and meaningful relationships with friends and family. What’s the result? “Three decades of seemingly limitless affluence have succeeded only in sucking our culture dry, leaving it spiritually empty and economically weakened. Our world is filled with self-absorbed, frightened, hollow people.” With such an unsuccessful track record, we should learn that finding purpose and meaning in life, on our own, only produces emptiness.

In his best selling book *The Purpose Driven Life* Rick Warren describes our pursuit this way. “The search for the purpose of life has puzzled people for thousands of years. That’s because we typically begin at the wrong point—ourselves. What should I do with my life? What are my goals, my ambitions, my dreams for my future? But focusing on ourselves will never reveal our life’s purpose.” How do we discover the purpose of our life then?

Speculation. This is what most people choose. They simply guess and hope. **Revelation.** We can turn to what God says about life in his Word. God hasn’t left us in the dark to figure this out on our own. He’s gone to great effort to tell us in the words of the Bible. Today, we’ll look to God’s Word in Romans 8 and here’s what we’re going to find: Your life purpose. Your life purpose is this: Allow God’s love for you to completely define you. Let me show you how we got to this climatic section of Romans 8.

In the beginning of Romans we saw there was a big, unsolvable problem—sin and death. “...*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom. 3:23). How many have sinned? All. Who is doomed because they fall short of God’s glory? All. Then we moved on to a big, unexpected solution—Jesus. “...*but God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rom. 5:8).

Do you see the love? He wasn’t just trying to fix a problem. He wasn’t just the hero that sweeps in and rescues us from trouble. He was moved to act by his love for us. We see something in this act that’s true of God’s love for his people. Love goes beyond

rationality. Love is more than logical. There is something mystical and emotional about God’s indestructible love. This is the kind of love God has for his children. Everything that follows in the book of Romans is built upon the foundation of this kind of love that God has for his people. Everything.

- Romans 6 – count yourselves dead to sin, because God loves you.
- Romans 6 – consider yourself alive to Christ, because God loves you.
- Romans 7 – count yourselves dead to all the do’s and don’ts because God loves you.
- Romans 7 – serve in the new way of the Spirit, because God loves you.
- Romans 8 – crawl up on God’s lap and call him your “Daddy” because God loves you.
- Romans 8 – when hardships come your way, don’t despair because God loves you.

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom. 8:31).

This doesn’t mean that we won’t have people or circumstances working against us. Of course that still happens. It means that anything working against us is weak and insignificant in comparison to God’s love. God’s love overshadows it. Allow God’s love for you to completely define you.

It’s like this. Last year a boy at my daughter’s school said some cruel and foolish things about her. Word spread and a bunch of her friends were talking about it. Understandably, this disturbed her. Why would he say this? Who can know the motivations of a 5th grade boy? But we can know that he was against my daughter. When I heard about this, I was livid. Why? Because I didn’t want my daughter’s opinion of herself being formed by this boy who didn’t know her. That’s my role. I want her to know that God made her beautiful and strong and caring and funny. As her father, it’s my role to build her identity. I am for her and nothing else matters.

How much more so from our heavenly Father toward us, his children? He looks upon us and sees Jesus Christ. He looks upon us and smiles. He looks upon us and says to the angels, “have you seen my beloved?” He beams and overflows with love for us. God

wants us to be so secure in our position of being loved by him that we are supernaturally confident.

In verse 32 we are assured that God won't hold back from giving us what we need because God was willing to sacrifice his Son. It's a strange paradox but here's how it works out. God loved the world so deeply, intensely and marvelously that he sacrificed his only Son, whom he dearly loved, so that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

God knew he would get a 2-fer: 1 – Save everyone who'd believe; 2 – Maintain his relationship with his Son after he rose from the dead. But the cost was heavy. The severity of the punishment Jesus endured on the cross was carried out in every detail. As the perfect Judge, God had to deliver the full punishment to Jesus that all of our sin deserved. God wants his followers to allow the depth and power of this kind of love to completely define them.

In verse 33 followers of Jesus aren't derailed from the accusations of people. In verse 34 followers of Jesus are unaffected by the judgments of others. Instead, the person who knows they are cherished and loved by God has their focus fixed on him. He frames their emotional response to life. This isn't just an intellectual idea; it goes beyond that. It must affect your heart and emotions!

Let's be honest, it can be difficult for a person to believe that God's love is so perfect. I'm saying that the Big Idea of these verses today is to allow God's love for you to completely define you. That's not easy to accept because we live with constant reminders that nothing else is permanent or lives up to its claim. It's threatening to allow something to define us that we can't control.

Take Hallmark cards as an example. They say "I love you" on the cover and on the inside it lists the reasons why. In essence they are communicating here's what you do for me that makes me love you. This can put a lot of pressure on a relationship. What if the "because" stops.

In relationships someone say's "I love you so much because ... " You fill in the blank—You are so nice, beautiful, sensitive, strong, disciplined, funny, intelligent, handsome. But what happens to their love when you stop being any of those things? The love is gone. This puts a lot of pressure on a relationship. It's because of pressure like this that Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter Colbie Caillat's (Cal-a) song *Try* became a huge and controversial hit.

"Try"

Put your make up on

Get your nails done

Curl your hair

Run the extra mile

Keep it slim

So they like you. Do they like you?

You don't have to try so hard

You don't have to give it all away

You just have to get up, get up, get up, get up

You don't have to change a single thing

You don't have to try, try, try, try-i-i

Take your make up off

Let your hair down

Take a breath

Look into the mirror, at yourself

Don't you like you?

Cause I like you

In an article with *Elle* magazine Colbie describes her motivation for writing this song. She feared that people wouldn't love or accept her unless she was all put together with no problems. When she asked for photos of her celebrity friends without their makeup, some said "no," some said wait a couple of days because "I have a pimple." This song was such a hit because she hit a nerve. There's one thing that's true about all of us: we long to be loved unconditionally but it's so rare.

And see if you know this song—***Thinking Out Loud***:

When your legs don't work like they used to before

And I can't sweep you off of your feet

Will your mouth still remember the taste of my love?

Will your eyes still smile from your cheeks?

And, darling, I will be loving you 'til we're 70 –

People love this song because it's a description of unconditional love. Seventy isn't a literal number. It's figurative. He's saying, "My love won't stop. Even when you lose the attributes I love about you, I'll still be devoted to you."

Why did this song win the Grammy for Best Pop Solo Performance? Why was this song the first song ever to hit 500M listens on Spotify? Because it describes unconditional love in a couple.

(describing the man)

When my hair's all but gone and my memory fades

And the crowds don't remember my name

When my hands don't play the strings the same way (mmm...)

I know you will still love me the same

The love described here is a wonderful love. We all long to be loved like this. It's a universal need of the human heart to be loved. Conditional love produces anxiety, fear, jealousy and heartbreak. Allowing God's love to completely define you gives you the purpose and meaning you long for.

Verses 35-39 keep expanding on this theme in this climatic section of Romans 8. Continuing on the effects of God's love for us, Paul gets really excited in these verses.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (v. 35).

Paul could have chosen a number of Greek words for "love" here.

Eros – a love based on feelings. Erotic love.

Phileo – a love based on mutual benefits, brotherly love. It would be like saying, "I love my company. I work and they pay me."

Agape – love that's selfless, sacrificial and unconditional.

Which word do you think he used? Agape!

Who shall separate us from the ... selfless, sacrificial, unconditionally given lavish love of Christ? You never did anything to get it in the first place, so why would anything ever threaten it being taken away? It's like this: God looks at the fullness of your inadequacies and your ugliness and says, I adore you. When we know this, it gives our lives the meaning we long for.

In verses 35-39 he gives 16 examples of threats that would stretch or break the bonds of Eros and Phileo love. But **not** Agape love: Trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword, death, life, angels, demons, present age or future ages, any powers, height, depths. Just in case he missed anything, anything in all creation. None of it, verse 39 says, "**will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**"

God's love is indestructible. Unshakable. Unmovable. The dog toys I buy say they're indestructible yet my dogs destroy them. These verses are describing something that's rare and beautiful. God's indestructible, unconditional love is given to his children **and** it is the only way for a person to find meaning and purpose in life.

You can hear it, but do you know it? Do you know the love of God? Are you experiencing it? How can you know if you know the love of God? The beginning of the Answer: Being a Christian is receiving God's love in such a way that your status is changed. You are his child (Romans 8:15). He accepts you as perfectly righteous because Jesus gives you his righteousness. You are renewed on the inside. You're born again. That's what it means to be a Christian.

But there's more. Why does Paul go so crazy here as he describes God's love for him? What is he experiencing? What does it teach us? It shows us the way to know God's love. Paul is modeling what a person looks like when they allow God's love for you to completely define them. It's not enough to know about God. We have to **know** him. Being a Christian is personally experiencing him. It's normal to ask, what does this mean? Paul is demonstrating knowing God right before our eyes. He's been talking about God's love since Romans 3:21. Teaching us. Explaining it to us. Laying out the logic, point by point. But as he gets to the

end of Romans 8, he's no longer instructing like a professor. He's gushing like an artist. He's modeling the effect of God's love on his heart!

The Apostle John had the same kind of heart-flowing explosion in 1 John 3:1, "**See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!**" John is gushing! Paul and John are modeling how the truth of God's love overflows the mind and fills all the rest of you. We have to know the truth intellectually. We must. But that's not knowing God. Knowing him happens when the truth seeps into our hearts and as Tim Keller describes it, "makes our rationality go crazy." Our rationality can't handle it anymore! It flows out into our feelings. Our will. Our actions. Our words. It flows out into everything. It's like when the truth goes through your life like lightning goes through a lightning rod.

Paul and John aren't giving us a scientific calculation of God's love. They've moved from analysis to intuition. Analysis is a detached experience. Intuition is when you feel it in your gut and you know it. They're showing us the way to know and experience God's love. How can I be afraid of hardship? How can I be anxious about persecutions, famine, angels and demons if I'm allowing God's love to define me? You can't. His love reframes everything you face in life. The troubles are still there but now you have this deep, unshakable confidence of how God is using them for your good. You aren't anxious; you aren't angry; you are completely surrendered to his love. And your identity is completely shaped by his opinion of you.

This is hard for people to understand today because people are wary of mysticism. Starting back in the 1960's people had objections to the "plastic man." Everything was robotic and mechanical—wear a suit, tuck your shirt in, wear a dress, say the right things. So the reaction to this was, we need experience and they turned to the mysticism of the East. We need to get rid of the rational and embrace the mystery of the universe.

That's not how the Christian experience works at all. We don't get rid of the rational. The Christian experience involves knowing the truths about God but it adds the mystical experience of his presence and feeling his love. It makes our rationality go crazy. It's like the ancient truths become fresh to us. It takes a truth about God we've known for years and suddenly it's new and fresh.

The Puritan theologian and preacher from the 1600s Thomas Goodwin describes it this way: Imagine a little boy walking along with his father. The boy knows he's loved by his father. All of a sudden the father picks him up. Hugs him. Kisses him and whispers in his ear, "I love you and I'll do anything for you." And the boy starts to weep. What's going on here? Is he getting any new information? Is he more of a son than he was before? Does he know anything new? No! He doesn't get a new idea but the idea

becomes new. He experiences and feels his father's love. Another way to put it: the truth becomes radioactive.

While I was a seminary student in Orlando, Florida I was working as a youth pastor. One of my roles was leading worship. I wasn't the most gifted at this so I had to practice a lot. One morning I was playing guitar and singing in my apartment. The lyrics of the song were: *"I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross."*

I started thinking about Jesus coming to earth because he loved me. I started thinking about Jesus dying on the cross because he loved me. I started thinking that the cost to him was terribly high. What could be worth such agony and pain? Me and You, if you're His.

I got choked up and tears were running down my face. My rationality started going crazy. I kept playing and singing this bridge over and over and I was overwhelmed by Jesus' love for me. These truths weren't new to me. I was in seminary; I was teaching and preaching all the time. But the truth became radioactive. It permeated my entire being. Why was I fearful, angry, insecure and anxious? All of those things will melt away when we experience the unconditional love of God.

This is what Paul and John are modeling for us. They are showing us the way to know God. They are moving beyond the rational. They are modeling to us what it looks like to be hugged by God. They are allowing God's love for them to completely define them and in that place they are finding everything their hearts long for.

I want to close with three implications on our lives. If you've never experienced God's love, know that he's offering it. Some of

you have never accepted God's love. Maybe today is the day you feel you want to enter a relationship with God. You've known the truth but now you feel a new desire in your heart that demands a decision.

If you're a Christian, know that you'll find everything your heart is longing for in God's love. Some of you have a genuine faith in Jesus but you've been living in your head and your heart is cold. Maybe today is the day you enter a deeper relationship with God and feel hugged by God. Some of you have a genuine faith in Jesus but you're allowing everything else to define you. Maybe today is the day you say "no" to all of that and you listen with fresh ears to God's voice.

If Christians could understand and know God's love for them, the result would be a world turned upside down, revolutionized by the power of God working through individual Christians and the church as a whole. In a recent conference my wife attended one of the speakers said, "If we understand how much we're loved by God, we'd be dangerous."

At the beginning of this sermon I said that your life purpose is this: Allow God's love for you to completely define you. If you wouldn't say this is true of you today, there's nothing stopping you from turning from whatever you're doing and receiving his love this morning. It's what you are designed for.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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