

# Truth or Chains



## THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE

A Critique By Jim Owen, Sr.

This book is sweeping the church world. Many local churches are using it as the standard textbook on successful Christian living. Church marquees announce the book as the new solution to the quest for a more meaningful Christian life.

### THE THEME OF THE BOOK

The dust jacket declares the book to be a “blueprint for Christian living in the 21st century.” This seems to beg the question: is the child of God to live differently in the 21st century from the way God planned for him to live in the past? A further question could be asked: has God not provided enough resources through His Word for the believer to live victoriously in the 21st century? After all, it was given by God that the man of God may be perfect thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

**"While the author denies that this is a self-help book, that is exactly what it is."**

### THE AUTHOR

Rick Warren is the founder and pastor of the Saddleback Church of Lake Forest, California. It is one of America's largest and best-known churches. The author has also written *The Purpose Driven Church*. It has sold over a million copies in 20 languages.

### WHY THIS CRITIQUE?

This book is well written and makes some good points. Yet, the solutions the author puts forth in order to accomplish the goal of successful Christian living have a fatal flaw typical of most books on this subject today. While the author denies that his book is a self-help book, that is exactly what it is. In it, the author sows the seeds of failure in the lives of earnest, well-meaning believers.

I believe Rick Warren is a sincere Christian brother. Yet, I must take issue with him regarding the most basic fault in this book: where is the Lord Jesus Christ? Thus my criticisms will not be leveled at him, but at his ideas of how a child of God should live the Christian life.

For the sake of fairness I would like to point out some areas of agreement with the author.

### POINTS OF AGREEMENT

The author has some good points to make in a number of areas. Although we don't believe it is biblical to set goals for one's life as Warren does, he does emphasize that such goals must not miss God's purpose for our lives. Warren also does a good job on the subject of worship: that life, like worship is not about you, but God.

Warren believes that spiritual maturity is not measured by the amount of biblical information one has and doctrine one knows. To this we can say Amen. He also believes that there are no accidents with God. Everything comes through Him and has a purpose.

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## Purpose Driven Life critique (cont.)

Warren is strong in his teaching on being a servant to others. This is a much needed emphasis. He further promotes prayer and places the emphasis on its power to get things done in life.

The above themes are well done. But then the author begins to construct ways and means by which the child of God can reach the goal of becoming a "world-class Christian." But this also introduces the weak point in the book. It is here that he points the reader to different methods and spiritual disciplines by which to obtain the goal.

## POINTS OF DISAGREEMENT

Entering into the Christian life is the first major section of the book. This section seems to be dedicated to bringing people to faith in Christ. This, of course, is of supreme importance. The force of the gospel was missing, however, because the author used *The Message*, a so-called translation by Navpress (1993). This is not a translation but an interpretation. The best that can be said of it is that it is often not even close to the meaning of the Bible. Of all the times when the author needs the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1: 16), he uses an inferior and very confusing authority as his source.

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The rest of the book is divided into five major sections which the author says are the five purposes God has for the child of God. These sections are:

- You Were Planned For God's Pleasure
- You Were Formed For God's Family
- You Were Created To Become Like Jesus
- You Were Shaped For Serving God
- You Were Made For A Mission

The first question that comes to mind is why does the author choose these purposes? It is true that they make for good preaching and teaching, but only one of these purposes is God's ultimate purpose for His children: that we become conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). It is this work of God that prepares the believer for God's pleasure, family, service, and mission, and they should be an outflow of that life. Like so much preaching today we are occupied with what the believer ought to do and so little with what God wants him to be—conformed to the image of His Son.

Had Warren's book concentrated on that one point, this book could have been of great value. The curious thing is that early on in the book the author makes a wonderful statement that is the basis of the real Christian life. He states, "When you rely on God to work things out instead of trying to manipulate others, force your agenda, and control the situation, then you know you are surrendered to God" (p.80). But then, by virtue of his instructions on how to attain the purposes of God for our lives, he engages in forcing his agenda, trying to control lives, and to manipulate people. And so it is the picture of a self-help book. Thus we are told to establish the habit, repeat a brief sentence or simple phrase. We are told to set goals, to attain, and develop the practice.

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## Purpose Driven Life critique (cont.)

The author instructs the reader that he must choose, must care, must desire, must intentionally seek, make the effort, must try, and make a list. He instructs us to let go of some old routines and develop some new habits and exchange the way you think. Even though he adds, the Holy Spirit will help you; he makes it clear he knows just how the Spirit will work in your life to accomplish these purposes. Yet, I don't believe he means to do that.

But that is exactly what he is doing. He seems to miss the real meaning of Philippians 3:13, "For it is God Who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." The work God wants to do in us begins by God putting the will to do His will within us, and then He gives us the power to do that will. It is all His work. We simply respond by faith, not by works first. This is the thrust of such passages as Romans 1:16 and Galatians 2:20. If God does not accomplish the work, we certainly will not be able to do it

Warren also promotes the popular notion that a Christian needs a group or a godly friend to whom to be accountable. He underscores the need by saying, "some problems are too ingrained, too habitual, and too big to solve on your own" (p.213). He overlooks the invitation by Christ to "Come unto Me all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11: 28-29). It appears that Warren is saying that God needs help to take care of His children. He further states that you are not going to solve your problems on your own (p.214). That is true, but the One you need is not another Christian friend who has his own "issues to deal with" but the One Who said, "...Without ME ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

"Discipleship" Warren says, "is the process of conforming to Christ" (p.219). That is true. However, the example of Christ is that He went to the Father in every situation, even during the greatest trial of His life, facing the cross in the garden. Why then should one counsel a brother to go to another man? Instead of going to the Giver of life, he wants them to seek the help of fallible man. This is not to say that God does not use other members of the Body of Christ, but our first move must be toward the Lord. Then as we wait on Him for His directions He will resolve our problem in His way.

To add to the evidence that this is, in truth, a self-help book, Warren says that the only way to develop the habits of Christ-like character is to practice them (p.221). On the same page he says that "repetition is the mother of character and skill." It is here that he introduces spiritual disciplines. Warren is saying by so much that the Christian life is not a genuinely new life with access to life-changing supernatural power— rather, it is nothing more than disciplining ones self to be more like Jesus, a process that never really finds a stopping point, for it never really works. Therefore, according to the author, we must review the lessons we have learned lest we forget them.

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## Purpose Driven Life critique (cont.)

Finally, Warren concludes that we must live purpose-driven lives that are committed to worship, fellowship, spiritual growth, and the ministry of fulfilling our mission on earth. But where do we find this in the Word of God? Like all the Christian self-help books, this book is filled with exhortations for the reader to do in order to obtain the Christian life God desires. While the writer states that Jesus lived a purpose-driven life, Warren overlooks the fact that Jesus' purpose, as stated in John 5:19, was that, "...the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." Jesus also said, "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and My judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father Who hath sent Me" (John 5:30).

Jesus was the quintessential picture of a life lived, and was always looking to the Father for His next move. He lived His life in peaceful, joyful obedience, not in self-effort, striving and working at His relationship with the Father. Thus, it was lived in utter dependence upon His Father.

The lesson is plain, once you leave Christ, even a little bit, and replace Him with something else, as good as that something may seem to be, you are slowly but surely moving away from Him. And, if we continue on this road long enough, we will have forgotten the place Christ should be in the church and we won't even know He's missing.

But He is missing, and with Him we are missing the wonderful movement of the Spirit with His convicting work and the attendant revivals and miraculous works. In vain we attempt to recapture by our own efforts what only Christ can do through His Spirit. So we find today that the Church is striving to replace the Blessed with His blessings. And they are not even aware of what is wrong.

The call from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22-23), is to return to the Author and Finisher of your faith. May we begin that journey back today.

Paul is also declared by the author to have been one who lived a purpose-driven life. Yet it was Paul who summed up his life as wholly Christ. And Paul's purpose is clearly stated in Philippians 3:10: "That I might know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." He did not keep before him these five purposes to which he had to strive to attain. Nor does He teach the first-century saints these goals for their lives. What Paul does teach us is that the just shall live by faith (Galatians 3:11). Warren's instructions on how to live the Christian life is not life, it is slavery.

Warren's book is simply another system of self-effort to become something and do things that someone has decided is the essence of the Christian life. Yet, like trying to keep the Mosaic Law, there is no clear way presented by the author to do so. It is hardly enough to say in passing at the end of the book, "The only way we can make this paradigm switch is by a moment-by-moment dependence on God." The child of God must be introduced to the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, so that he will understand Jesus is more than The One Who saved him from Hell and will take him to Heaven when he dies. He must be presented in all His beauty as the One Who wants to have a personal relationship with him. And this truth takes time to understand and have it become real in one's life. Therefore, the emphasis must be on the LORD JESUS CHRIST, not on us.

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## **Purpose Driven Life critique (cont.)**

Beside all of this, the emphasis in the Scriptures is not dependence upon God, but rather, child-like trust in Jesus Christ. Paul, in Galatians 2:20, states, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of (in) the Son of God Who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Can anything be clearer?

The Bible tells us that it is Christ Who is the Good Shepherd (John 10:14). He is always leading us in triumph (2 Corinthians 2:14). He knows what we will face in the future and He will be there and provide for us (Mark 4:35-41).

The Christian life can only be lived by Christ through us, and He does so as we wait upon Him. The Christian life is His direction, His wisdom, His solutions, His answers, and His provisions. This is a life without all the formulas, the to-do lists, and the myriads of instructions. It is a life of restful waiting and obedience toward the Head of The Church. So, not only is the Christian life a simple life, but it is also a life that is content with Christ having the preeminence (Colossians 1:18), not us or anyone else.

While man makes the Christian life so involved, the Lord Jesus, through His Word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit makes life simple. That isn't to say that it is easy. The apostle Paul and the martyrs testify to that. And any mature Christian can attest that the Christian life is not easy. But the Christian life is simple, for Jesus Himself is the life.

But where is He today? If He were given the honored place in every church, our programs would be few but our purpose would be clear—the exaltation of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5-11). If our emphasis was on the Lord Jesus our Christian books would direct our thoughts to God's Son—His life, His work, and His Person. They would direct our thoughts to His glory and to His honor. Instead, we have a hundred and one things that take His Place. While well-meaning, they are still deadly to the Christian life.

The Body Of Christ has lost its way today, especially in America. We are like the Laodicean church of Revelation 3. Like that church 2000 years ago, many of our churches imagine that they are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing. Yet the Lord Jesus sees them as wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked and in need of repentance. And, like the church at Ephesus, they have lost their first love (Revelation 2:1-7). This is why in Revelation 3:20 we see Jesus standing at the door and knocking. Having found no place in the churches, He is outside knocking for entrance into any believer's heart who will open his heart—let Him come in—and have communion with him.

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