

BIBLE STUDY 3 (LEADER'S GUIDE)
The Meaning of Life: A Gift From God
Third Sunday: Life Is a Gift To Be Used to God's Glory
"Why am I still here? Why won't God just let me go home?"

For the past two weeks, we've been discussing how to handle death as Christians. Today God's Word directs our focus on how to handle the life we have before we die as Christians, regardless of its quality.

Introduction: Imagine this scene. You are lying on a hospital bed. You are unable to speak or respond. You aren't able to communicate in any way. You can hear what is going on around you, but no one knows if you are even aware of their presence. What is going through your mind?

Why didn't God take me? Will I ever be able to communicate again? I wish they knew I could hear them. I sure would like them to _____ (tell me about my grandkids, comfort me with God's Word, give me something to think about, something to distract me, etc.)

Today we'll look at how God uses our lives here on earth as we approach death, often in ways we would never have guessed.

I. First of all, why are we here in the first place?

- Read 1 Peter 2:9-12 and list the two related reasons given.

1 Peter 2:9-12 ⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

*To declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.
To live lives that encourage others to glorify God.*

- How does 1 Corinthians 10:31 answer that question?

1 Corinthians 10:31 ³¹ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

To give God glory.

Sometimes, though, doesn't it seem that God would be more glorified by this or that person if they were in heaven already singing with the saints and angels? In Romans 8, God tells us that He works all things for the good of those who love Him. God's Word gives several examples of God serving good through sufferings.

II. Why do we suffer here?

- Read the following passages and discuss why God allows us to go through difficulties and why He may cause us to suffer longer than we choose.

2 Corinthians 1:3,4 ³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

So that we can help others through their sufferings later.

Galatians 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

So that we can fulfill the law of Christ

Matthew 25:40 ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' "

Giving people an opportunity to serve Him.

Ephesians 2:8-10 ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

God may be giving others an opportunity to do a good work.

Philippians 1:12-14 ¹² Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

God could be using your situation as a way to encourage others to share the gospel.

Examples: Consider these stories and evaluate the quality and value of the lives involved.

- **Luke 10:30-35** ³⁰ In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "

- What was the quality of the traveler's life as he was lying on the side of the road, left for dead? *Apparently not too great – helpless and broke and injured.*

- What was the value of that traveler's life as he was lying on the side of the road, left for dead? *High – made and redeemed by God and used by God to give an opportunity for His people to serve Him and give glory to God.*

- Why did God allow that traveler to survive the attack? *To give the Samaritan a chance to show love – one of the “good works God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

- **John 9:1-7** ¹As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷ “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

Use this true story to defend the statement: God gives people a low quality of life for His glory. *In Jesus' day, being blind meant that you were essentially helpless and reliant on others for nearly everything. The quality of life was considered so low that it was naturally assumed a person was “punished” with the condition of blindness. Jesus flips that on its head when He says that this happened so that God would be glorified, so that people could see God's work. Then He adds that our opportunities are limited to the here and now – so let's give God the glory in how we handle all of those quality-of-life issues.*

- Mildred never said a word in the four years I knew her. She lay on the nursing home bed, apparently on the brink of death, only communicating through a few facial expressions. Then, her body started rejecting the food that was coming through the feeding tube, which caused all sorts of problems and ultimately resulted in its discontinuation. The family figured it was only a matter of time...not much time. God caused her to continue living for more than 11 weeks without food because the options for feeding her had been exhausted. Consider some ways God might have used her during that additional time.

Some of the discussion might include opportunities for family and friends to serve God by serving her – talking with her, being there for her, holding her hand, reading God's Word to her, praying for her, singing hymns to her.

Some discussion might include the opportunities for relationships between those who cared for her to be healed as they were reminded of what was really important. Also consider the impact that those visits might have on Mildred's roommates and nurses. The real Mildred gave her pastor an opportunity to share law and gospel with a worker cleaning her room and had been such a testimony to the nurses through those who came to visit her that they started calling her “the angel.”

Someday, that might be you. Your loved ones will want to show Jesus' love by showing you love. They might be frustrated and confused, not knowing if you can hear them, not knowing what you want. Think about that. What would you want them to do?

As this discussion continues, pass out the activity page entitled, "My Wish List." Then continue to discuss this question as you go through the page. Depending on time, you can either give this sheet as an assignment or talk about parts of it to get people to share their ideas which others may want to use.

Activity: Develop a wish list for those who might visit you when you aren't able to communicate with them. Include on the list opportunities for them to serve Jesus by serving you. *Perhaps the congregation could store a copy of this document in the member's file. Appoint someone to be responsible for filing them.*

Closing Prayer: O Lord, teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. And as we consider the number of our days, bless us with the confidence that our times are in Your hands, and You have purpose for all of our days. Help us to see all life as a gift from You and use the life You have given us for You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

My Wish List

Name: _____

This form is intended for all those I love if I am ever unable to communicate with you. Know that God has a purpose for my life, even now, and that He is working even this for the good of those who love Him. Realizing that I may not be able to communicate with you, here are some things I'd love to hear...

My favorite Bible stories, passages, and sections:

My favorite hymns:

My favorite topics in our life to hear about:

My favorite prayers to pray with you:

And here's what I'd like to say to you...

In Christ's Love,
