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## THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

Some of the most perplexing questions that men face are those having to do with life and its purpose. Those who wander through the years of mortal existence, unaware of the eternal purpose and plan, find life holds nothing of deep meaning. To those who catch a glimpse of the eternal purposes, life is an endless challenge to achievement of the better things that can be. To live without at least a basic concept of this purpose is merely to exist.

“Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and, God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again in their infant state, innocent before God” (D&C 90:6b). Many people have erred in thinking that Adam and Eve were placed in the garden of Eden in a state of perfection and that, having fallen therefrom, it is the purpose of our lives to return to that state of perfection. This is a faulty point of view because we confuse perfection and innocence. Man was created in a state of innocence but not perfection.

“In the garden of Eden gave I unto man his agency; and unto thy brethren have I said, and also gave commandment, that they should love one another and that they should choose me their Father” (Genesis 7:40). Had man been perfect in his creation, he would also have been perfect in his use of agency; and there would have been no fall.

In the creation of man, God looked for people who were worthy to walk with Him, not because they could not sin, but because they chose to walk righteously. He sought for those who would not be simply submissive but for men who would be intelligently obedient, for “the glory of God is intelligence” (D&C 90:6).

Thus, He created man in a state of innocence, free of sin and having all the potential of godliness within him. However, to be godly, each man must by his own choice choose to live righteously. For man to become worthy of eternal life with God, it was necessary for him to be given opportunity not only to prove himself but to grow through untold numbers of right choices—making godly use of his agency.

The Lord said, “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil, in that I command thee this day to love the Lord, thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply; and the Lord, thy God, shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it . . . . I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live” (Deuteronomy 30:15-19).

Alma wrote, “Therefore, this life became a probationary state—a time to prepare to meet God” (Alma 9:41; see also 1 Nephi 4:52; 2 Nephi 6:56, 15:10).

Modern-day revelation tells us, “This is my work and my glory: to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (D&C 22:23b). Webster defines immortality as “unending existence.” In contrast, he defines eternal (in scriptural connections) as implying “a state or quality other than mere duration.” This is in agreement with the statement of Christ, Who said, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

Thus, we see that God was not to be satisfied with the mere “unending existence” of man but sought to make it possible for him to become worthy of eternal life with God. Man, with the true understanding of the purpose of life, then becomes challenged by the values of eternity; and life becomes meaningful, filled with hope and expectancy.

Without God’s help, man is lost. With all the challenge of eternity, man must have a guide—a source of strength—if he is to achieve a quality of life worthy of its purpose. Alone, man is weak and unable to move toward God. The apostle Paul, recognizing the carnality of man and the nature of sin, cried out, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:26). God, recognizing man’s need, sent His Son; and “as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12).

Webster says that religion is the service and adoration of God, expressed in forms of worship in

obedience to divine commands. Jesus recognized the importance of this concept among the Jews who believed in Him and said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

King Benjamin's proclamation included this admonition: "Believe in God; believe that he is and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all things which the Lord can comprehend. And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins, and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God, and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you. And now, if you believe all these things, see that ye do them" (Mosiah 2:13-17).

Only as man obeys divine commands does strength come to free him of the sin that separates him from God. Religion is important to the extent that it teaches man these divine commands and causes him to be obedient to them. The resultant flow of the power of Christ into his life leads man to adore God and to achieve the purpose of life as he becomes a son of God.

Nephi reports the voice of the Lord, saying, "He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me; wherefore, follow me and do the things which ye have seen me do. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow the Son with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ by baptism, yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost" (2 Nephi 13:15-16).

Nephi continues with the rest of the story: "And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this straight and narrow path, I would ask if all is done. Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far, save it were by the word of Christ, with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save; wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father, Ye shall have eternal life" (2 Nephi 13:27-30).

Ecclesiastes 12:13 sums up our purpose in life: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Why is it impossible to live adequately without basic concepts of the purpose of life?
2. Why do we believe man is created in a state of innocence rather than perfection? What does such a belief demand of each of us?
3. What did Christ have as His main work on earth in relation to God? In relation to man?
4. What is religion? Why is it important?
5. What gift of God most expands or limits man's growth?
6. How may man best enjoy his sonship with God?
7. What is the most important thing (purpose) in your life?