

**gospel-centred**

# **Life**

*becoming the  
person God wants  
you to be*

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# 1

## A life for God

### Principle

It's not about me—it's about God and His glory.



### Consider this

John walked through the factory gates. The prospect of yet another shift filled him with dread. There are only so many plastic widgets you can churn out, day after day. He knew his prospects weren't good. Walking into a new job was as likely as joining an expedition to Antarctica. He couldn't help wondering if this was all he had to look forward to.

During his first break he sat quietly by himself and watched as his work mates went about their routine. He thought briefly about what was discussed at the Bible study the night before, where they talked about life being all about God's glory. It sounded plausible enough in Kate's front room, with a latte in your hand. But here, in the real world, he was struggling to see how any of it applied to his current tedium.



### Biblical background

*Read 1 Corinthians 8 v 1 – 11 v 1*

- ? In 10 v 31 Paul tells the Christians in Corinth to do 'all to the glory of God'. List all the ways highlighted in this section of the letter in which the Corinthians were not doing this.
- ? If they were not doing all for the glory of God, what seems to have been motivating them?

? In 10 v 32-33, the context of v 31, how does Paul describe what it means to do 'all to the glory of God'?



### Read all about it

Living for God's glory contradicts everything we've ever been taught and everything we've ever wanted to believe. I'm the centre of my universe. I see everything and everyone from my perspective. So my instinct, if I think about God at all, it is to think of 'Him' in relation to 'me'. God, for example, is just... if I can be persuaded of His justice. God is love... if He expresses it in ways acceptable to me. The net result of this heart-set is that God is brought each day to the bar of human reason and prejudice, and made to answer for His alleged failures, crimes and misdemeanours.

But if my life in every aspect is to be lived for God's glory, honour and reputation, then it is only about 'me' to the extent that 'I' relate to 'Him'. Clearly, that puts 'me' well and truly in my place. Of course, the gospel assures us that there's no better place to be. But still my ego kicks and screams when it's put there.

When we start with God's glory, He becomes the reference point. I only understand justice and love in relationship to Him. If my life is to be lived for His glory, then I no longer occupy the defining place in the great scheme of things. If my life is all about His glory, then His glory becomes the great, unchangeable principle against which everything is assessed.

Believe me when I say that there are few things quite so liberating!

So what does it actually mean for my life to be all about God's glory?

It means that the person I am, the life that I live, the things I do, all commend God to others—both people and angels. It means I'm a trophy of His grace. There's no other explanation for who I am and how I live except the sovereign and supernatural work of the

triune God. All this means that a life lived for God's glory is a truly extraordinary life. A life that anticipates eternity.

Imagine for a moment your arrival in heaven. All the angels are lined up to welcome you, and all the saints who've gone before are ready to cheer as you walk through the gates. Those that know you have front-row seats and you instantly recognise their faces, though they're all much more attractive than you remember. The noise is deafening and the sense of coming home is almost too much to bear. At first, you think that they're there for you and in a sense they are. But then you realise that no one is patting you on the back and saying well done. All the cheers are for God! All the praise is directed to Him for His magnificent work of taking a broken specimen of humanity and transforming her into a breathtaking example of what grace can do. Just as no one stands in a gallery and praises the canvas and paint, so no one in heaven will look at me and praise me for what a fine job I've made of my life. It's the artist who is applauded. It is God who is praised.

If that image captures in any way something of our destiny, then we can live now in anticipation of eternity. My life is to be of such a calibre that only grace can produce it and only God receives the glory.

Let's nail that down with some specifics.

Anyone can love his friends. Only grace can produce someone who loves his enemies and seeks their good so that God gets all the honour.

Anyone can forgive one act of betrayal. Only grace can produce someone who goes on forgiving time after time so that God gets all the honour.

Anyone can dip into her purse and give coins to a beggar. Only grace can produce someone who sells her possessions and gives the proceeds to the poor so that God gets all the honour.

Anyone can expend himself on behalf of his wife. Only grace can produce a husband and wife who open their homes to the destitute and oppressed so that God gets all the honour.

I should live my life with a radical and determined intentionality that ensures that every aspect of it honours the God who made and saved me. We need to lead thought-full lives. All too often our actions and words have no explicit thought of God. The end result of living such a thought-less life is selfishness, brokenness and sin. But by grace we can live our lives with a ‘glory intentionality’, by constantly asking ourselves: how will this glorify God?

For example, what would change if, when I was about to get involved in an argument with my wife, I thought: how will this glorify God? If God and His glory were at the forefront of my vision, then any argument between us would be impacted in a profound way.

When I’m responding to criticism: how will this glorify God?

When I’m making decisions: how will this glorify God?


When I’m disciplining my children: how will this glorify God?

When I’m playing football: how will this glorify God?

In every aspect of my life I should be thoughtful and intentional by asking this question: how will this glorify God?

That’s how radical and expansive it is. Which is why we can’t put it better than the leaders of the Reformation back in the 16th century: *Soli Deo Gloria!* ‘Glory to God alone.’

### Questions for reflection

 Think about how this principle works out in the following situations:



- A mother faced with an obstinate two-year-old flexing his self-will
- An old person facing his sixth evening in a row alone
- A teenager coming to terms with being paralysed
- A 26-year-old man in a church that has an average age of 68 and an average attendance of 23

- ❓ Think about the last 24 hours. In what ways have you not lived for the glory of God? If you've not already done so, spend some time asking for God's forgiveness and thanking God for His grace lavished upon you.
- ❓ In the coming week, think about how this principle works out in your life. Make it a habit to ask yourself regularly: how will this glorify God?
- ❓ Consider how you might encourage others in the coming week to live for the glory of God.

# 2

## A life for others

### Principle

It's not about me—it's about loving God and others.



### Consider this

'It's hard to believe so much could have changed in such a short time,' Lou thought to herself. She tried to think back to six months ago. She was pretty sure she wouldn't have even entertained the idea back then, not even for a minute. She liked her personal space. She was happy to be with people and help out when she could, but there were times when she needed some down-time. Her home was the ideal place. Yet here she was, sitting in her kitchen, waiting for Ayisha, the refugee from northern Iraq, to arrive. A housemate! Who would have thought it? But what else could she do? The girl needed a home and she had space.




She could almost pinpoint the moment of her change of heart. It was as she listened to a talk she had downloaded on Romans 5. She began to understand the gospel in a new way. Okay, it might be a tad clichéd, but there was no other way to describe it: she had been deeply moved and had even begun to sob. The Lord just seemed so much more real to her. And she wanted to please Him. Of course she wanted to serve and bless Ayisha, but that was because she so much wanted to serve and honour her Saviour.





### **Biblical background**

*Read Matthew 22 v 34-40*

-  How does Jesus answer the lawyer's question?
-  Why do you think Jesus answers a question about the greatest commandment by highlighting two commandments (v 37-39)?
-  How might the Law and the Prophets depend on these two (v 40)?



### **Read all about it**

Self-love is big business. A well-known cosmetic company sells its products by paying beautiful celebrities to recite the company's mantra: *'Because you're worth it'*. The UK Health Service encourages self-esteem in their employees beginning to feel stress with a ten-point plan, number four being: *'Take care of yourself—you're worth it'*. Whitney Houston once sang: *'Learning to love yourself, it is the greatest love of all'*. Sorry Whitney, notwithstanding your angelic voice, I'm afraid you've missed the point. We don't need to learn to love ourselves—that comes all too naturally.

The Bible tells us that we were not made for that.

As you read through Genesis 1, it's easy to detect a rhythm and pattern to the story. Each section begins with the words: 'Then God said...' and ends with the words 'There was evening, and there was morning...' Day six also begins in this way, but in verse 26 the rhythm is interrupted. God begins a conversation using the words 'us' and 'our': 'Let us make man in our image...' Man was to be the image of the complex deity that is God. That is why it was Adam and Eve together, Adam and Eve in relationship, who were made to bear God's image. It was as they loved one another, served one another and took responsibility for one another that they revealed the character of the Creator.

Although this is *implicit* in the Genesis 1 account, it becomes *explicit* in Genesis 2. The writer fills in some of the detail of the great panorama he has painted for us in the first chapter. Eve was made after Adam, but it was not merely as a supplement to him to cure his loneliness; it was as one suitable for him that he could love. When Adam, as Eve's head, loved her, and Eve, as Adam's helper, loved him, they were walking, talking, living images of the complex, inter-personal God who made them.

This is hugely significant. At a fundamental level this answers the question many of us have asked at some time: who am I and what is my life all about? If we believe the Genesis account, we no longer have to face the prospect of a mid-life crisis or fear getting lost, forever in the dark about the point of our existence. I am made to be a lover of God and others. So whether I am a preacher, a teacher, a street cleaner or an unemployed shelf-stacker, God's call on my life is to be a *lover*. In the previous chapter, we considered asking in every situation: how will this glorify God? Now the question has expanded in line with the answer of Jesus to the lawyer: how will this express love for God and others?

Can you see the far-reaching implications of this perspective? If my life is primarily about me, then Christianity is substantially less than the inside-out, upside-down revolution that Christ died to achieve. Jesus promised that the truth would set us free. In breaking the hold of sin on our lives, He has done precisely that. Loving self is the cruellest of all slaveries: it promises everything and delivers nothing. Loving God and others is the most liberating of all freedoms: it promises everything and gives us more than we can ever imagine.

There is a refreshing simplicity in this identity and purpose for living. It's in loving God and others that we bring glory to God because it's only His grace that can do this great work in us. In Genesis 3 we see the man and woman turning away from this calling. Instead of being lovers of God and others, they both became lovers of self. The Bible reveals a world full of self-lovers. Our own

experience serves as a vivid illustration of this because it repeatedly reveals a heart full of self-love.

But God's grace enables me to focus on God and others. I'm released from the bondage of self-regard. I'm set free from the stifling fear of others. I'm rescued from the debilitating pursuit of selfish satisfaction. I'm set free to live the life I was made to live.

If I love others as Christ loved others, then my sense of fulfilment or comfort is irrelevant. I won't be enslaved to the opinions of others. I'm free to love them in whatever way is most appropriate. But if, instead, I love myself, then my relationship with other people will be all about how I can get them to love me more. However, if I truly love them, then—when I need to rebuke them—I'm not going to fear what they think of me or whether they'll reject me. What stops me loving others by giving a needed, gentle rebuke is self-love. Self-love isn't just silly. It's a fundamental denial of who I am as a human being made in the image of God.

Which is reason number 267 why we are thankful for transforming grace!

### Questions for reflection



- ❓ Over the coming week, look for ways in which self-love is celebrated in the media or in day-to-day life. Remind yourself in those times that you have been made in the image of God and be thankful that you have been set free to love God and others.
- ❓ Consider how this love for God and others might be expressed in your relationships at home, in work and at church.
- ❓ If you are a shy person, the next time you find yourself sitting next to someone you don't know, remind yourself that God has made you to be a lover of God and others. Ask Him for the grace to express that love in the moment. If you are an

outgoing person, the next time you are in a social situation and the centre of attention, remind yourself that God has made you to be a lover of God and others. Ask Him for the grace to express that love in the moment.

? Think of certain relationships that you find difficult. How does this teaching help and encourage you?