

A Lutheran Guide and Reading Schedule for Rick Warren's The Purpose Driven Life

Rick Warren's book, The Purpose Driven Life, is a wonderful devotional journey into discipleship. However, it is written with some Baptist and Presbyterian overtones. Because we do not want to get sidetracked by differing theology, we offer this guide to help you in your day-to-day reading. It is healthy to read different perspectives. Doing so calls us to remember and clarify our own beliefs. The basic truths and questions in this devotional get right at the heart of our relationship with God in Christ, and offer us a deepening journey into discipleship. May God bless your journey, and our church's journey together!
-- Pastor Charlie and Pastor Jay

Day 1: It All Starts with God (Sunday, February 22)

Focus on the idea that we cannot arrive at our life's purpose by focusing on ourselves. We must begin with God. It is only in God that we discover our origin, identity, meaning, purpose, significance, and destiny. We are given our God-intended identity in Baptism when God declares, "You are my child, forever!"

Day 2: You Are Not an Accident (Monday, 2/23)

God created us to serve God's purposes. But God also created us with free will, the freedom to make choices. God, as Parent, encourages us and wants us to choose wisely, but will not force us to choose God's way. An important point: As Lutherans we believe that God is like the best possible parent. No loving parent would intentionally inflict or harm his/her child. However, for some reason, God does allow suffering to impact our lives. Even Jesus – God in human form – was not immune to suffering. What the Bible teaches is that God suffers with us, and that God will see us through whatever storms we face. We can trust that God is with us.

Day 3: What Drives Your Life? (Tuesday, 2/24)

God's forgiveness is all about being set free from what holds us in bondage. Sin is what separates us from God. The death and resurrection of Jesus has overcome all that separates us from God and holds us captive. Through a Lutheran lens, it is not so much about "preparing for eternity," as helping to bring the Kingdom of God's grace into this world. Like Jesus, as we live out God's purposes here and now, the Kingdom of God becomes real for others. Jesus invites us to begin living into eternity, starting now.

The goal of life is to grow into the likeness of Christ. When Lutherans think about standing before God and accounting for our lives, we picture Jesus standing with us before the Father, interceding on our behalf, claiming us as his sisters and brothers for whom he lived and died. At the same time, we are held accountable for our stewardship of life. How have we used our God-given gifts and passion to serve God's purposes? How did our faith lead us into loving service? We can please God with our choices.

Day 4: Made to Last Forever (Wednesday, 2/25)

Lutherans emphasize that we are created to serve God here-and-now. We are Kingdom Builders! We continue the work of Jesus. We live in the light of God's love for us in Jesus, and we serve out of gratitude and love. When we realize the love God has for us in Jesus, we begin to live differently. It might be helpful to substitute "God's love" for the phrase "light of eternity."

Day 5: Seeing Life from God's View (Thursday, 2/26)

What's our worldview? Is the world benevolent or capricious? Is our goal serving or acquiring? Do people look out for you, or are we to take advantage of others? Is it about giving or accumulating? Life as a "test" is a biblical metaphor. Another way to say this is "life often challenges our faith in God, and our trust in God's goodness." These times of challenge are opportunities for growth in our faith, if we choose to invite God into them. We always have to choose whose "will" will be done and how we will view what happens to us. Do we invite God into our struggles, and ask God to use them to shape us for God's purposes? Doubt is not the opposite of faith. Doubt and questioning, and even anger, are integral components of faith. Total honesty with God, and offering these feelings, questions and experiences to God, are how God uses life's hardships and trials to continue our growth as maturing disciples of Jesus.

Life on earth is a trust. This is a very positive Lutheran perspective. On page 45 Warren moves into the theme of judgment. The Bible makes it clear that we will be held accountable. But Lutherans tend to see judgment through the lens of accountability, not fear. The Lutheran perspective is that God's grace leads

us to trust in God's love (faith), which leads us to respond in acts of loving service. Grace -> Faith -> Response. A life without a loving response toward God is a life without faith, and therefore, void of hope and meaning.

When we think about the maturation process, what Warren calls "tests" we see as "opportunities for growth." We are growing into the likeness of Christ, which is a process. The situations we encounter in life are viewed not so much as "tests," but as learning and growing experiences.

Day 6: Life Is A Temporary Assignment (Friday, 2/27)

This chapter deals with the transitory nature of life. Our attachments divert us from God and our purpose to serve him and his Kingdom. Page 48 – It might be helpful to translate "Your identity is in eternity, and your homeland is heaven," by "The most important thing in life is our relationship with God in Christ and serving him." As Lutherans, we remember that in Baptism God gives us our identity – children of God. In Baptism, God gives us purpose – to love him with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, and our neighbor as ourselves. Page 50 – First paragraph – Another perspective is that we feel discontent when we go our own way and buy into the cultural gods of power, prestige, and materialism.

Day 7: The Reason for Everything (Saturday, 2/28)

What is God's glory? Go back to Genesis. God made everything and it was good. God intends for everything to live in relationship with God and each other and serve God's purposes. It is a symbiotic relationship, everything created for a purpose and working together to serve that purpose.

Sin is anything and everything that leads us away from God and serving God's purposes; anything that breaks our relationship with God and/or with each other. God is to be worshipped because of who God is, not because of what God can do for us. God is worthy of our praise, thanksgiving and service. Liturgy means "the work of the people." For us, worship is not a spectator event, but an encounter with the living God. We gather to worship to renew our relationship and enjoy God's presence. Worship is not about what we "get out of it," but "what we bring to it." Worship is how we live our lives each day in serving the God whom we love.

Day 8: Planned for God's Pleasure (Sunday, 2/29)

Baptismal emphasis: You are a child of God, and you bring pleasure to God like nothing else he has ever created. (p.63) Life is an act of worship as we bring an awareness of God into all our activities and seek to serve Jesus through them.

Day 9: What Makes God Smile? (Monday, March 1)

Emphasis – we are created for relationship with God. Page 71 – Trusting God implies that God knows what is best for our lives. Think about the parent/child relationship. Like our own human experience, God doesn't plan every event that happens. Rather, God walks with us and helps us deal with situations as they occur in our lives. Is there randomness in the world? Many Christians say yes. But God is with us in that random-ness. In fact, it is often in chaos or brokenness that we find God creating something new and good.

Day 10: The Heart of Worship (Tuesday, 3/2)

Lutherans do not use the word "surrender" much. Nevertheless, it lies at the heart of our faith. It is giving up claim to our own lives, what we want, and giving ourselves over to what God wants with us and for us.

When we are created, there is a "true self" that God intended us to be; a self created in God's image, the image we see in Jesus. But we are shaped by our culture and the world in which we live. This is the "false self." Often we talk about wearing masks to keep others from knowing who we truly are. Many think that we can get from the "false self" to the "true self" by willing ourselves to change, through human effort. The Bible indicates that the only way to move from the false self (the old nature) to the true self (new nature) is by surrendering ourselves to God, falling into the hands of the living God. In essence, this is what confession and forgiveness is about – a change in direction. As Luther would say, it is a daily dying and rising in Baptism; dying to our old way of living and rising to live God's new way. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Day 11: Becoming Best Friends with God (Wednesday, 3/3)

Page 88 - "The key to friendship with God is not changing what you do, but changing your attitude toward what you do." Awareness of ourselves is the first step in changing our attitudes and the way we respond.

Day 12: Developing Your Friendship with God (Thursday, 3/4)

For Lutherans, obedience grows out of love, not coercion, not fear, not guilt. Parents hope their children will listen to what they say out of respect and love. Obedience grows out of our trusting that our parents and our God have our best interests at heart, and truly love us no matter what. Caution is needed on page 98. Why is there pain and suffering in our lives? Lutherans understand the message of the Bible to say that God pours himself into our suffering, and that God teaches us through suffering, but not that God wills it for us.

Day 13: Worship That Pleases God (Friday, 3/5)

Focus on the 4 characteristics: (1) accurate – "in truth;" (2) authentic – heartfelt/genuine; (3) thoughtful – engaging the mind; and (4) practical – a life that reflects love for God. Romans 12:1-2: True worship is offering our lives to God's service, placing God first, last and only in our lives, discerning God's will and then doing it.

Day 14: When God Seems Distant (Saturday, 3/6)

We do not believe that God intentionally tests us with absence. However, there are times when God will seem absent in our lives. There will be arid times when our relationship is dry. Similarly, there are times when we feel separated or distant from our spouse or friends, but that doesn't mean that they do not love us or that we're being tested. During these periods we remember that we walk by faith, not by sight. We trust God even when everything else seems to indicate otherwise. We look to the cross and Jesus' own experiences of feeling abandoned by God. Jesus trusted that God was with him and would ultimately deliver him and vindicate him.

Day 15: Formed for God's Family (Sunday, 3/7)

From a Lutheran perspective, Baptism is the sacrament of belonging and inclusion. This is God's action, not ours. God initiates. God chooses us. We respond to that choice. Just as we did not choose our parents, but respond to their love, so it is true in our relationship with God. For Martin Luther, Baptism was the primary sacrament. It marks our birth into a life lived in God. It reminds us of God's claim upon our lives and God's desire for us to know the joy of his love. Baptism also reminds us that a life lived in God is a daily dying and rising; dying to living our way or the way of our culture, and rising to live, like Christ, in God's way. In Baptism God claims us as children, adopts us into the family of God's people, forgives us our sin for turning away from God, gives us the gift of his presence through the Holy Spirit, and promises us eternal life. A life of faith begins in the water and Word of Holy Baptism.

Day 16: What Matters Most (Monday, 3/8)

It's all about love! Being in relationship is the training ground for learning to love and growing into maturity. We cannot do this when separated from the community of God's people. A life of faith is a life lived for others. It is not about "me," it's about how I might serve you. A guiding question might be: How would Jesus respond to or love this person? How does Jesus want me to love? It's a variation on "What Would Jesus Do?"

Day 17: A Place to Belong (Tuesday, 3/9)

The church is not a building or organization, but a people, an organism. We exist to carry on the mission of Christ! We are literally the Body of Christ in the world. Christ has no hands or feet or arms or legs or eyes or ears but ours! We need each other in order to carry out the mission Christ has left us. The community of God's people becomes the very place where we get "on the job training" in learning to love and serve one another.

Day 18: Experiencing Life Together (Wednesday, 3/10)

Note the importance of small groups and experiencing the intimacy and support we need for the journey of faith. Note the qualities that define the community.

Day 19: Cultivating Community (Thursday, 3/11)

Note the principles for small groups and building fellowship within the church. Where do we experience fellowship? What would it take for us to risk forming and being in a small group? Note the barriers and

what is needed to overcome them. "Speaking the truth in love" is difficult, but essential. It is sharing how we affect each other, not with the desire to put down or hurt another person, but for the sake of nurturing and deepening our relationships as meaningful and whole.

Day 20: Restoring Broken Fellowship (Friday, 3/12)

Because God blesses our lives and restores our relationship through Jesus, therefore we work to restore our relationships with each other. When relationships are restored, we experience the peace God wishes for us.

How might we be God's blessing to the world as we work for "peace" as described in this chapter? How can we embrace diversity and yet find a sense of unity?

Day 21: Protecting Your Church (Saturday, 3/13)

Unity not uniformity! We are called to build up, not tear down, to focus on understanding, not criticizing. What unifies us? One Lord, one faith, one hope, one Spirit, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. When we focus on personalities, preferences, interpretations, styles, or methods, division always happens. But if we concentrate on loving each other and fulfilling God's purposes, harmony results. (P. 162)

Day 22: Created to Become Like Christ (Sunday, 3/14)

Lutherans would understand the goal of the Christian life as growing into greater maturity until we have the mind and heart of Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit. As Luther says in the Third Article of the Creed: "I believe that I cannot by my own effort or understanding believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith. In the same way the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

We are all works in progress. We cooperate and make ourselves available to the Holy Spirit and give ourselves to the faith practices that God uses to form us. It's not so much imitation as inhabitation. We pray that the Incarnation we witness in Jesus happens to us. God invades and occupies our lives. We invite God to do so.

Day 23: How We Grow (Monday, 3/15)

Baptists emphasize a conscious decision made by the individual. Lutherans emphasize God's decision about us, and our decision to respond to Christ, through the community. WE CAN LEARN FROM EACH OTHER HERE. Jesus calls, and we respond. As Warren mentions, we are not working to "earn or deserve" our salvation. That has been won for us through Jesus. But we make conscious choices to grow in our relationship with Christ. Faith practices take intention. Just as we make conscious decisions about what we eat or how much we exercise or study, so we make decisions about praying, reading Scripture, worshipping, using our gifts, inviting others, giving of our time and resources, and serving others. To get better at music, sports or a hobby, it takes practice. That's the way we are designed. Likewise, practicing our faith helps us mature.

Day 24: Transformed by Truth (Tuesday, 3/16)

As Luther said, the Bible is the cradle in which we discover Christ. The Bible is the Word of God. It reveals God's character, love and purpose. But the Word of God is most fully known in Jesus, the Word made flesh. The Bible is God's love letter to us. As we read and reflect on its message, we encounter the living God.

Day 25: Transformed by Trouble (Wednesday, 3/17)

Lutherans do not necessarily believe that God has a purpose behind every problem. Our perspective is that God can use every problem/situation to serve God's ultimate purposes. Why do bad things happen to good people? It is the question of Job and Jesus. Warren gives the sense that God allows suffering or causes it, as opposed to a Lutheran perspective of God enduring it, entering it, and overcoming it with us.

In this chapter we deal with what is sometimes called "God's permissive will." Does God control everything that happens or does God permit it to happen as a matter of human choice or circumstance? Lutherans believe that ultimately God will get what God wants. This is predestination. But God does not manipulate everything that happens. Romans 8:28 indicates that God is working with us to serve God's

ultimate purpose. Philippians 4 would indicate that we should “rejoice and give thanks” NOT FOR everything but IN everything.

Day 26: Growing Through Temptation (Thursday, 3/18)

This is a good devotion on how to deal with temptation.

Day 27: Defeating Temptation (Friday, 3/19)

Here are some helpful strategies for dealing with temptation.

Day 28: It Takes Time (Saturday, 3/20)

This is a good devotion on growing toward maturity. Patience is key.

Day 29: Accepting Your Assignment (Sunday, 3/21)

As already stated above, Lutherans believe that we are saved from sin in order to be saved for service. We are created for ministry in the church, to build up the Body of Christ, and for mission in the world, to help bring in the Kingdom of God as a reality for others. Maturity, while the goal of the Christian life, is not an end in and of itself. Maturity leads to ministry. This is a good place to emphasize our Gifts Ministry.

Day 30: Shaped for Serving God (Monday, 3/22)

The beginning of this devotional is a little heavy on predestination. God created us for a purpose – to serve God as we use our gifts and passions to work for the Kingdom. We remember that each day is a gift in which God spreads a banquet table before us from which to feast. God gives each of us gifts. Whether we use them to serve God is our choice. (Free will) SHAPE is a great model for understanding our giftedness.

Day 31: Understanding Your Shape (Tuesday, 3/23)

Each of us is unique. We are called to serve God’s Kingdom. If we don’t fulfill our calling, others go unfulfilled. If we don’t share our gifts or serve in the Body of Christ, we weaken it and it won’t function as God intends. Page 146 – God permits and uses our situations as learning experiences. We can learn from every type of experience, sometimes more from adverse situations than good ones. God does not wish painful experiences in our lives any more than we parents wish our children to suffer. But God uses painful situations to help us learn and trust that God is with us.

Day 32: Using What God Gave You (Wednesday, 3/24)

A good development of Gifts. We need to learn to accept ourselves, and our God-given shape.

Day 33: How Real Servants Act (Thursday, 3/25)

Life offers us “tests.” With God, they become opportunities for growth and serving others. There are limits to being available, but no limits in the situations in which we find ourselves. It’s a matter of attitude, focus and orientation. Key for Lutherans: Servant attitude – how might I be Christ’s servant for/to you? Page 262 – Lutherans do not believe we serve for reward. That is more of a cultural understanding and motivation. Rather, we serve as a means of showing our love for God as we love our neighbor. Page 263 – We can serve God’s purpose wherever we are. Place is not as important as faithfulness.

Day 34: Thinking Like a Servant (Friday, 3/26)

Underlying question: What does it mean to have a servant mind and heart? What does it mean for Jesus to be my Lord? Is Jesus the only one I listen to, take my directions from, and seek to honor or please?

Day 35: God’s Power in Your Weakness (Saturday, 3/27)

Emphasize learning to accept our limitations. How does our self-perception limit our responding to God? Henri Nouwen writes: we are wounded healers. God uses our brokenness as a way of bringing help to others who experience similar situations.

Day 36: Made for Mission (Sunday, 3/28)

This devotional seems a little tilted toward judgment. What is my piece of God’s dream that I am to work on in order to help bring in the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of love, grace, mercy and justice? Consider the Via de Cristo motto: Make a friend, be a friend, bring a friend to Christ. The goal of mission is to introduce people to Jesus, not make them members of a church. That introduction happens by the way

we love them in Christ's name. When they see and experience Christ through us, they will want to know and experience Christ, too.

Day 37: Sharing Your Life Message (Monday, 3/29)

This devotional might be uncomfortable for us. How can we become more comfortable sharing our God-story? Most likely we will need to practice. Try it with some friends, or meet someone for coffee from your group. This would be a good opportunity to get people to share their faith stories. It's important for us to share our stories of how God's love has touched our lives. Each of us has a story to tell. Try to express yours, and practice.

Day 38: Becoming a World-Class Christian (Tuesday, 3/30)

We are to be mission-minded. God's love is not turned in upon itself, but is outwardly directed. Read Acts 1 and 2. We live under the Great Commission to make disciples in all the world and teach what Jesus has given us. We need to think both globally as well as locally when it comes to mission. Check to see if anyone has served on a mission trip and, if so, get him/her to share the experience.

Day 39: Balancing Your Life (Wednesday, 3/31)

Life is all about balancing priorities, and living out what is most important. How do we make sure the five purposes are at the center of our lives?

Day 40: Living With Purpose (Thursday, April 1)

Good ending devotion. Develop a purpose statement and commit yourself to it! Say a prayer of thanks to God for this experience of *40 Days of Purpose*. Ask God to bear fruit in your life, and in our congregation, for years to come, as we move forward in God's Purposes together.