

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *Ultimate Purpose...and Nascar*

**SERIES:** *Habits*

**SCRIPTURES:** *Matthew 22:34-40*

**SPEAKER:** *Shaun Kipe*

**DATE:** *2022 - 1 - 16*

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*\*Credit to Rob Douglass; Dallas Willard;*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you gathered on-line, at home, tuning in to the live stream.

We are in the second week of our series called habits (**Series Graphic**), talking about the habits we create that influence the kind of people we become. And I will just say, if you missed last weeks message...remember we had icy weather? I recommend taking time to go back and watch that message. It sets the stage and the background for today's message and really the entire series. So, I think it's worth your time.

A Duke University study suggests that as much as 40% of what we do in a given day is the result of habit, rather than conscious choice. We do what we do, because it's our habit. But, more importantly than that, as we discovered last week...habits form character.

Remember this quote from author John Dryden, "**We first make our habits, then our habits make us.**"

We are, each of us, becoming a certain kind of person...and the daily habits we live by are forming that person. This is why our habits are crucial to our discipleship.

What kind of person are you becoming?

But, there is another important question I think we need answer and that is: What kind of person do you want to become?

And that's what we're going to talk a little bit about today. I want to talk about the connection between our habits and what we believe is the ultimate purpose of life.

**“Understanding your purpose is crucial in right habit formation.”**

## **I. Habits and ultimate purpose.**

### **A. Aquinas**

So let's start with this man. **(PIC OF THOMAS AQUINAS)** Does anyone know who this is? This is Thomas Aquinas, one of the early church theologians and master thinkers. Anyone who studies church history or theology or begins taking classes in Bible will very quickly come across Aquinas' many writings.

Someone who had way too much time on their hands has calculated that “in terms of a sheet of today's printer paper, Aquinas was writing an average of nearly twelve and a half pages of words a day, every day, all year long.” I have trouble writing 12 pages in 7 days as I write my sermons!

He was a pretty remarkable thinker. And one the things that Aquinas wrote about was this connection between purpose and habit.

The Greek word Aquinas uses in his writings related to purpose is the word **telos**. Telos means **end or goal or purpose**.

Everything, and also everyone in life has a telos...the reason for which you were created. And you need to know what that is, if you are going to incorporate the right habits in your life.

Let me give you an example of this...

Take a NASCAR for example (**PIC OF NASCAR**). About 20 years ago, I fell in love with a beautiful young woman (**PIC OF JENNY**), whose father was a bigger NASCAR fan. So I became a big NASCAR fan. This is a Biblical principle. The patriarch Jacob, worked 14 years in a pig sty for the girl of his dreams, I learned to love NASCAR. Love watching races. Going to races. Nascars have a TELOS, they are built with a very specific purpose in mind. Speed. They are not like the car you drive around town...even though some of you think you're a racecar driver.

They run on about 750 horse power. Your Ford F150 trucks have only about half of that. Which is also why Nascars get about 2-5mpg per gallon, travel at 220 mph and their tires are rubbed raw in a matter of just a few laps.

This car has a very specific purpose...driving as fast as possible around the track. It is the end for which it was made, the purpose for which it was created.

But if you try to use a NASCAR for some other purpose, it's useless. It is not helpful in getting around town or taking your kids to sports practice or transporting your elderly loved ones to the grocery store. It wasn't made for that.

Now think about this concept in relation to your own life: What is the purpose (TELOS) of human beings? What are we here for? Why did God make you?

The truth is, according to Aquinas, how you answer that question will have a significant impact on the kinds of habits you incorporate in your life.

Is the purpose of life to make a good living, retire early? Is the purpose of life to make as much money as possible? Is the purpose of life to start a family and have children? Is the purpose of life to achieve occupational success? Is the purpose of life to achieve athletic prowess?

**Knowing the purpose of the journey is critical. “Most Christians mirror cultural goals, desiring happiness, comfort, security, belonging, and popularity. Surprisingly few are focused on completely cooperating with God to experience the kind of whole-life transformation described in the Bible and made possible only through a partnership with God. The lack of understanding of the goals of a truly Christian life prevents people from making the extraordinary life transition that are possible.” (George Barna)**

Why did God make you?

Now, before we answer that question specifically (ultimate purpose of humans) I think it's important to recognize that many of us have never taken time to think about our ultimate purpose...we have not thought about why we exist and so we end up living by faulty purposes.

## **B. Faulty purposes people live by.**

First...

### **1. Comfort/Leisure**

Much of what we do and how we behave (our habits) is for the sake of comfort or leisure in our lives.

A few years ago we bought a family van. It was a used vehicle, but new to us. And had some features that I had never had in a car before. One of them, was heated

seats. Have you sat in a car with heated seats? 15 degrees outside, but you sit in these seats and just start feeling warm all over. And then I get in my little car to drive to the office each day and I begin to think, man I should really have heated seats in here. You start getting used to them. You think you deserve them.

Or have you thought about your garage door. You sit in your car press a button and the door opens for you.

You sit in your easy chair recliner and push a button and the TV turns on. You no longer have to walk into a grocery store, you place your order on line and then someone shops for you and places the items in your car when you arrive.

A life-style of comfort and leisure is all around us. This is why the entertainment industry is such a lucrative business. I was reading one study that said we Americans spend about 3 times the amount on entertainment as we do on Education.

And it's not bad or evil or wrong...but if we're not careful, we start to believe that life is about pursuing comfort and leisure. And it starts to form our hearts. We start to believe we deserve or we have earned or we have a right to our comfort and leisure. It can make selfish, greedy, soft.

One of my favorite all time stories in Scripture is the story of Jonah. It's fascinating and is really built around the idea of an awareness of ultimate purpose. Think about it, God sends Jonah to confront the Ninevites with their wickedness.

You need to understand, the Ninevites were a dangerous, nasty group of people. They were known for some pretty gruesome behaviors. This is how the Bible describes Nineveh.

**Nahum 3:1 - Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims!**

There are in fact, ancient paintings from some of the Kings from Nineveh which (no joke, this is kind of gross, I'm gonna gross you out a minute) show prisoners being skinned alive, stabbed, beheaded, impaled on poles, their appendages or tongues being cut off and their eyes gouged out.

The Ninevites were wicked people. God tells Jonah to go onto their home turf and tell those people about their wickedness...how do you think they'll respond? That's why Jonah ran the other way.

Now this story does not make sense if the greatest purpose in life is comfort or self-preservation. It only makes sense if the ultimate purpose in life is something else.

When leisure and comfort become your primary purpose in life, you can be sure it is affecting your life habits and ultimately your character...and you will likely miss out on becoming the person God created you to be.

A second faulty purpose that often trips us up is...

## **2. Family**

And let me just explain...

**Matthew 10 - <sup>37</sup> "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."**

Now, Jesus does not mean you should not love your family. Rather, Jesus is making a statement about ultimate purposes. It's a conversation about priorities...what is ultimate and what is secondary.

We all have a priority list. My wife. My kids. My work. My hobbies. And the question is, where is Jesus on that list?

Barna research group did a study in 2015 on the most significant influences in our lives. And what they discovered was kind of eye-opening regarding Christians and our priorities.

The study showed that Christians say they would rank their priority as **God – Family – Country**

But what they actually discovered is that in the practical living of our daily lives (our habits...that which is forming our character), God (faith) was actually much less of an influence on our choices.

That in a world of competing priorities.

There are so many things in this world that we give our love to. There is **family, athletics, work, hobbies...** And we are constantly being pulled to those things that are comfortable, familiar, profitable, easier.

Unless you hate mother and father, brother, sister...you cannot be my disciple. It's not that you should hate your family, it's a matter of priority. In fact, I think what Jesus would say is that, when you make him the priority, then he helps you to love your family the best way possible. I think Jesus would say, don't try to love your family as best as you can on your own. Love me and I will teach you how to love your family best.

So much of our following Jesus in our daily habits is not about choosing between GOOD and EVIL, rather it is a matter of priority.

Finally, let me suggest one more faulty purpose out there, that I think can be dangerous for Christians to buy into...and follow me on this because it may not make sense initially...

### **3. “Escapist Heaven”**

Many people in churches today believe that the ultimate purpose of life is “to go to heaven some day.”

And I’m not saying going to heaven isn’t important. I’m saying we may be aiming at the wrong target if we make “going to heaven” the ultimate goal of life.

To ask it another way: **Is the greater purpose to get into heaven or to get heaven into you?**

Do you see how the way in which you answer that question, changes how you think about your daily habits?

I just wonder if this is why so many followers of Jesus see very little transformation in their lives, and end up looking like the rest of the world. We’ve believed that the ultimate purpose is to get into heaven. And all that it takes to do that is to say a prayer. And we’ve done it. And that anything beyond that is “icing on the cake.” And so the habits of daily life, that lead to character formation, living like Jesus become secondary.

Dallas Willard says it like this, **“The main thing God gets out of your life is the person you become.”** Escapist heaven puts the purpose of life on the final destination as a place you go, rather than the person you become.

So how are we doing so far on ultimate purpose? What purpose are you building your life around? comfort, family, escapism...

I want to encourage you, this week to set aside some time to have a sit-down with yourself and Jesus and consider...when it's all been said and done, what is the thing matters most in your life? And then second...if someone were to evaluate your habits would they be consistent with what you profess as your purpose?

Ok, so now that we have looked at some of these faulty purposes that people chase after...let's go back and see if we can answer this question:

### **C. What is the primary reason for your existence?**

Why did God make humans?

Christian theologians down through the ages have said the same thing in different ways...

Thomas a Kempis would say that purpose of humanity is: "to be in complete union with God." Brother Lawrence would say: "to converse with God constantly." Dallas Willard says: "in this physical existence of ours, to be like Christ." The Apostle Paul said: "Imitate me as I imitate Christ."

All different ways of saying something very similar. Bible scholar Scot McKnight suggests that Jesus answers this question for us in his own words...

**Matthew 22 - <sup>35</sup> One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: <sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'<sup>[c]</sup>...<sup>39</sup> And... 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'<sup>[d]</sup>**

To love God and love others...this is why God made you, it is the telos of your life. In the same way a NASCAR is built to go fast, this is what you are built for.

**Whatever else you choose to do in life, if you are not cultivating habits of loving God and loving others, you'll have missed your purpose.**

So with our remaining time this morning. I would like to be as practical as possible and I would like to suggest a couple of habits that we can cultivate as we seek to fulfill our telos: loving God and loving others.

### **1. Two habits to cultivate in “loving God”:**

The first habit we must cultivate in loving God is...

**Sabbath...**this is creating space in your weekly schedule to rest with God.

This concept comes right out of the creation story...

**<sup>3</sup> God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.**

The Hebrew word for holy here, is the word **kadosh**.

And in all of creation, the Sabbath day, is the only thing God deems as *kadosh*. The earth, space, land, stars, animals — even people — are not designated as *kadosh*. Only the Sabbath day is holy.

In other words, God set aside one day a week, for resting in his presence...you were created his way. No it doesn't have to be Sunday. But if you don't prioritize Sabbath as a habit of life, you will miss out on the becoming the person God created you to be.

And I will just warn you on this, we live such fast-paced, fluid lives this habit seems to have gone by the way-side in our world.

One author says it like this...

**“In one generation, Sunday (and I’m not saying Sunday has to be that day) evolved from a day of rest and worship to a day to buy more stuff we don’t need, run errands, eat out, or just get a jump-start on our work for the week ahead.”** (34).

I just wonder how many of us are truly resting in God’s presence every week?

Dallas Willard writes...

**"You must arrange your days so that you are experiencing deep contentment, joy, and confidence in your everyday life with God."**

It starts with the sabbath habit...Sabbath must be a habit if you are going to “love God.”

Second...habit you can cultivate in loving God...

### **Scripture before screen.**

Nothing sacred about this, but if I were to ask you, what do you know more intimately your phone or Jesus? What would you say? Honestly how do you think you would answer that question?

I was thinking about it just this week. We know so much about our phones. My kids were teaching me just this week, that you can ask siri to turn your phone flashlight on and off for you. We can navigate through smart phones at incredible speeds with incredible accuracy because our phones have become second nature to us...habit! And yet many in today’s world have a very limited ability with our Bibles.

The Barna Research Group has done research on followers of Jesus and our familiarity with Scripture. You ready for this...60 percent of us cannot name one of the Ten Commandments. One out of three people who follow Jesus cannot name the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)...the very books that tell about Jesus life. Seventy-five percent believe the saying, "God helps those who help themselves" is in the Bible. (It's not. It was Ben Franklin, not the Bible.) Twelve percent believe Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. I'm not even making that up. "Mrs. Ark." Twelve percent of people. (Ortberg – Barna Group)

Screen habits have become second nature, what if knowing Jesus became part of our priority as well.

So consider a new habit. **Scripture before phone.** Commit to yourself that in 2022, you will not look at your phone before you take a few moments in Scripture. Or before you sit down in the evening to turn on the TV, scripture for a few mins first.

Sabbath and Scripture before phone...not because we want to follow human rules and God will love us more. But because these can be ways we practice loving God and that's why were made.

Ok, second...you were made to love others. So let me suggest two practical habits you could consider this year.

## **2. Two habits to cultivate in “loving others”**

Start with...**MEALS**

In our world, our busy schedules are king and we try to fit meals in and around our schedules.

Have you ever had this experience...You wake up in the morning thinking about all you have to do today. Your mind starts racing. *Breakfast* is usually on the run, whatever you can grab as you run out the door so you can get to work and start completing your tasks. Once at work, you find a rhythm and by *lunch* you don't want to break that rhythm...so you work through lunch or swallow it down while you work. By dinner at the end of the day, you are exhausted and just want to relax. Dinner is on the way home, in front of the television, on the fly, whenever, however you can get it. And without realizing it, our relationships suffer significant damage from this "habit."

Meals and relationship are so closely connected. Almost every holiday and the gathering of our family and friends can be designated by the food we eat. From cheeseburgers on the fourth of July to Turkey at Thanksgiving. We often celebrate a person's birthday by making the meal they like best. Dating is based around sharing meals. And I think it's because at a meal you can focus your attention on the people around you. You can talk.

Jesus often met and interacted with people over meals.

One of the central symbols of our faith is a meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. The Last Supper. The early church was known for their habit of sharing meals together.

When we have no time for meals it's our relationships that suffer.

If it's true that you were created for loving others...then meals are one of the primary ways that we do this.

Can I encourage you to create a meal habit this year? Share one meal a week with others. It might be a meal with the family every Monday night, around the table, no screens aloud. It might a meal at work, with your co-workers, no working through

lunch, no talking about work over lunch just eating in the company of another person.

Then second...**Manage media**

And I know in the last couple of weeks I've been hard on media, phones, screens...you all are gonna wonder if I'm anti-technology. No, I am certainly not. Our media and technology is important and valuable.

But because of how prevalent it is in our world, it's one of those habits that can just crush our relationships with people if we're not careful. The same way that our phones often eclipse our time with God, our focused attention on media and screens often keeps our attention from the people around us. It just so easy to get lost in the virtual world and consume significant amounts of time. Beyond that, whatever it is that you are consuming during that time is impacting you mentally, emotionally, spiritually.

You can be sure if you don't determine how you will spend your time, your habits will decide for you.

So I suggest, evaluate your media/screen time. Manage it. Include those things that are important and valuable and worth your time and eliminate the media that is simply wasteful or detrimental to loving God and loving others.

**Only when your habits are constructed to match your worldview do you become someone who doesn't just know about God and neighbor, but someone who actually loves God and neighbor.** (Justin Early 273)

When we fully understand our purpose, it allows us to examine our habits and consider which are leading us in the direction of our purpose and which are leading us away.