

The Purpose of Life

Romans 15:3b

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We've all heard people say, that we are thought of as the instant generation, that is, that we are the generation that love instant coffee, instant soup, instant television dinners, and usually when people say that, they mean not only that we like instant soup and instant coffee, but that we like everything right now. We want everything right now. Of course the truth is, with instant things you don't get everything right now. In instant coffee, you don't really get the taste that your old Norwegian or Swedish grandmother brewed into it by her special method, you don't. You get an imitation of the original that you get so used to, that you forget what the original was like, and you begin to prefer the poor imitation.

And it's the same with soup. In instant soup, you don't really get the kind of soup that your mom was able to make after hours and hours of cooking and preparation. What you get is an imitation of that soup, that you eventually get so used to that the commercial advertising people tell us we prefer the imitation to the original. We're so accustomed to it. And what actually happens is, we probably lose a little of the relish of life, we actually do, and probably that's happening all through our lives. We're getting more and more instant oriented and we're actually getting less and less than we used to, but we don't know it. We just know that life is somehow steadily losing some relish and some enjoyment and some satisfaction that it seemed to have back years ago.

Now the effect that that desire to have things right now has, is serious enough in regard to eating and dining and cooking, but it is disastrous loved ones, in relationship to its effect on our present society and our institutions, and the stability of our relationships and our personal relationships with each other. This emphasis on "instant, instant, instant, I must have it right now", is destroying and undermining the whole stability of our society, the stability of our family relationships, the stability of church relationships, the stability of institutions in our society. All of it is being undermined, until we seem to be standing at times on nothing, and it's because of this preoccupation with "we must have things right now, we must have it instantly".

You remember we talked about it in August, in regard to the relationships we have with other people who are weaker than ourselves in something. For example, a friend who maybe always looks on the black side of things or somebody else who is kind of clumsy with hammering a nail in a wall or just not good at practical things. And we are so preoccupied with getting instant results -- get them to put that nail in right, get them to stop looking on the black side of things -- we're so preoccupied with getting instant results, that we utterly misinterpret the solid good instruction that God's word has given us for these kinds of situations. In actual fact, what we end up doing is getting people to make temporary changes in their habits in our presence. We don't actually get them to change deeply their natures, we just pressure each other into situations where we please each other for the moment, but we don't deeply change in our natures. And actually whether it's a husband and wife team, or whether it's a father and a daughter team, or whether it's friends in a church team or friends in a business or roommates at school, it doesn't matter what the relationship is, but instead of the relationship moving on to a deeper level of solid unity and stability, it actually just continues in a kind of bouncing off relationship, for the years that you happen to be together -- without either of you ever being changed deeply, but instead just making little adjustments, so that you can put up with each other.

Now you remember that that kind of attitude that we have towards people who are a little weaker than ourselves in something has prompted us to mistranslate good teaching that the Bible gives us. I'd ask you to look back to it, loved ones. Many of you who are maybe here for the first time, will not realize that we have been studying the book of Romans for 15 years, actually for 18 years. It's just that some of us were in a different part of the campus when we started, but I remember I looked up my first sermon, you'll smile, I looked up my first sermon and I've an illustration in it and the illustration concerns a certain man called L.B.J., who was then President [Lyndon B. Johnson]. So that's when we started Romans, so we're still at it and we're going to get to the end sometime in this century, I think.

But anyway, we are in Romans 15 loved ones, and it's there that the good clear direction from God is given to us. And it's Romans 15:1, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves." And our desire for instant everything, makes us take that translation "bear with" and we take that seriously. We say, "Yeah, that's the job, you can't get the nail into a wall, okay, my job is to bear with him. I'll bear with him, I'll put up with him. I'll say to him, well, if you can't get it in yet, can you, would you like any help? Are you having trouble with that again?" That's bearing with, it's putting up with -- and so often we interpret it that way. We say, that's right, we should bear with the failings of the weak. Okay, she's being pessimistic again, okay, he's mishandling the money again, well, I should bear with him. I should put up with him and of course by subtle sledge hammer means, let him know that I'm putting up with him -- because after all that's the only way he's going to change.

And that's not the Bible injunction at all. The Bible injunction uses a Greek word called "bastazein" and it means "to bear" and it's the same word that is used in Isaiah 53, where it says, "Jesus bore our sins." And it doesn't mean he put up with our sins. It doesn't mean as God put your sin upon him, he said, "Oh you're not giving me that old sin to put up with again, are you?" It means he bore our sins willingly. He carried the load for us. He allowed his Father's wrath to burn that sin out in his own body, costing him incredible pain that we could not have borne, He bore it for us. He carried the load for us and that's what the Bible says we're to do. We're to carry the load for each other.

Do you see what happens when you put up with a person who is weaker than you at something? You just think of your friends and think of the things they do. They're to put air in a tire and you know, "Ah, I could put that in, in half the time." Or they're trying to screw a screw into a wall and you feel, "Oh here, give me that, I'll put it in." Or they make another error in counting up the bank account and of course it throws you into chaos and you just say, "Oh well, all right, I suppose there's some answer to it." Bearing up, you bear up in that way. Do you see the effect it has on them? All it does is pressure them. It doesn't change them, it just pressures them. They feel kind of nervous or uptight when you're around them, when they're doing that thing and they decide out of fear of you, they're going to change, they're going to try to do it better, and sometimes even in their anxiety to please you, it makes them less capable of improving. But even if they do improve, they improve only momentarily. They just make the change that moment, but there is no deep change deep inside them.

And you see, you and I have a tendency to think, oh, I don't see why there isn't. I've told him, I've told him how to put a nail in the wall, I've told him how to screw screws into the wall, I've told her how to keep the check stubs balanced, I've told her. I told him not to get worried about things or get so black and pessimistic as he always does. I've told them, I've told them a thousand

times. Because we have the idea that to help a weaker brother or a weaker sister, all they need is to be told. And loved ones that's not the problem at all. We're not here just to bawl people out. That's not the way to improve people or change people. We're not here just to tell them. That's not what is needed.

What is needed is what is mentioned in the next verse that we studied a few Sundays ago, it's Romans 15:2. "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him." We've to edify our neighbor when they're in that situation. Now here's where I think a lot of us go astray. We hear that word "edify" and we think edify, oh, it's very like "educate", it must be the same stem, "ed". They both begin with "ed". Oh, so it's more or less the same thing. Yeah, educate, edify, good. I must edify him. Okay, I must educate him. I must inform him what he is doing wrong, I must inform her what she is doing wrong.

Do you know that the two English words come from absolutely different stems? Educate is from "e" in Latin "x" which becomes our "exit". "Duco", which becomes "duke" I suppose, is "to lead out". Educate means to lead out. It comes from two Latin words; "e" and "duco". Edify is from a totally different Latin word, which is actually spelt not "ed", but "aed", and it's a Latin word, "aedifico". And "aedifico" means to put up a building. It means to build up. It means to strengthen. Edify actually etymologically has nothing to do with educate. Educate is to inform people, to tell them, to remove ignorance. Edify is to strengthen, to build up, to nourish, to nurture.

Now, let me tell you a secret. The ones of us here this morning who worry and who get anxious, the ones of us here this morning who have a tendency always to look on the black side of things or to be pessimistic, the ones of us here this morning who are a bit clumsy with our hands and aren't too good at practical things, the ones of us here this morning that have a tendency to worry about our finances or have difficulty keeping our finances straight, our problem is not ignorance. I want you all to know that. Our problem is not ignorance. It's not that we don't know we shouldn't worry, it's not that we don't know we shouldn't be anxious, it's not that we don't know we shouldn't be pessimistic, it's not that we don't know we're clumsy, it's not that we don't know we make a mess of the check stubs, it's not. We know! Please -- we know -- we want you all to know, we know, we don't need to be told. We know. It's our natures that need to be changed and strengthened. That's it.

A worrier doesn't worry, bless his dear heart, because he doesn't know it's wrong to worry, he doesn't. He worries because the wee soul can't help worrying. The one that knocks a hole in the wall instead of knocking the nail into it, they do it because they are like that, their nature is like that, they need to be changed in their nature. They know they shouldn't knock holes in walls, they know that. When she backs out of the garage at 30 miles an hour in reverse, she knows that that's not the best treatment for the gears; she knows that, she's not dumb. But, it's something in our nature that has to be changed.

We all know that in some amazing way God has changed our nature. But we don't know how to get into that, we don't know how to get into it. And we need help. We need to be built up to allow that change to be wrought in us. That's it. We don't need to be bawled out, we don't need to be told off, we don't need to be educated, we need somebody to build us up, so that we can receive that new strength from the mighty work that God did in the depths of eternity to change us.

Now some of you might know what that work is, so I'll just remind you of it, if you'd look at 2 Corinthians 5:14. It's just a mighty statement for us human beings here on the earth. It's 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died

for all; therefore all have died." That's the change you see, that's the mighty change that was worked by God in reality. He took you and me, and because he has powers to see all of time in one great moment, future and past mean nothing to him, it's one great eternal moment. He put us into Christ and he destroyed us there and made us new. And that's what you get in verse 17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." That's what we haven't entered into. Yeah, with the guy who is clumsy with the nail, yeah, I agree with anybody here who says, we will not all be brilliant carpenters. No, we won't all be brilliant carpenters, we won't all be Einsteins, we won't all be brilliant at accounting, we won't all be the greatest positive thinkers in the world, but we will be able to walk clear of those weaknesses.

God will enable us to do that. He'll enable us to get a nail into the wall, one way or the other. He'll enable us to count our check stubs properly. He'll enable us to live in peace and freedom from worry and anxiety. If we are willing and able to allow that change which he wrought in Jesus to come into us, that's what we need help with, that's where we need help. We need to be encouraged. You remember the way we put it, two or three Sundays ago, there is a wind that blows from Calvary, because Calvary in time is only the expression of a mighty change in all of us that took place in eternity. God changed us all. Do you know that? You see, we're all born in all kinds of weakness, but God then changed us all in Jesus, in eternity, in that timeless, spaceless world of eternity. God changed us all and made us capable and competent. Now, you might know that that is the gospel actually. God did that in eternity, and the Holy Spirit is able to make that real in us, here in this present life.

So that's what we're talking about and what we need is to be able to do that. There is a wind that blows from Calvary and we need to be encouraged to set our sails, you remember I said, set the sails of our faith to catch that wind, so that it lifts us into the completeness that we are in Christ, that's what a person needs. Much as we did with our little children. When the guy hit his thumb for the third time, you didn't say, "You stupid little soul, what are you doing that for? Give it to me." And the tragedy is, we forget what we did say in those days. We forget it when it comes to dealing with our wives or our roommates or our friends or our colleagues at work, that's the tragedy, isn't it. We remembered it when we dealt with that funny little fellow with his little fingers, 5 or 6 year old and we had such pity for him. But it seems that the pity goes out of our hearts when it comes to dealing with our colleague at work or our secretary or our roommate or our professor at school.

But do you remember, you said, "Come on son, here I'll show you how to hold the nail and you can do this, sure you can do it." We didn't explain to him that God in Jesus had changed him and made him capable of doing it. We didn't explain all that theology to him. We said to him, "Sure you can do it, you can do it." Really deep down, we mean "I can do all things through Christ who strengthened me." We didn't say that, we said, "Come on, I'll show you how to hold the nail and you see here, I'll hold your hand and then you hit it. See? That's it, you got it, that's great." That's what we did. That's what the Bible means. You edify each other.

When you find your roommate is weaker than you at something or your wife or your husband or your friend or they're failing in some way, you don't bawl them out, you encourage their hearts. So the person says as usual, "Oh, that always happens to me" -- their old pessimism comes through, always looking on the black side and they say to you, "There it goes again, that's the way it always goes in my life, everything goes wrong, it always goes wrong for me." You don't respond to them, "You black pessimist, you're always at that stuff, why don't you give it a miss? We all have our troubles." You don't respond like that. You say, "No, everything hasn't gone wrong with you and

there are lots of things that have gone right and there is a power, there is a power in this world that will make your life go right. So now, come on, let's forget what's happening now and let's begin to look at what can happen in you."

And we take that step, and you respond that way. The difficulty is that many of us at that moment expect bouquets of roses. We expect bouquets of roses, and we expect that they'll just thank us for what we've said, and they'll just think, oh, you're just wonderful, what an encourager you are to me, how you help me in my weakness. And we're never prepared for the next reply, "Who do you think you are -- some great evangelist that you are talking to me like that?" And that's where you know the next verse is important, and maybe you'd look at it, it's where we left off, you remember.

It's Romans 15:3, "For Christ did not please himself; but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached thee fell on me.' You've not only to bear their weakness, you've to bear their reproach after you have borne their weakness. That's part of it, that's part of the whole ministry. When they say to you, "Who do think you are, some good evangelist, telling me to keep my heart up?" -- when they say that, the reproach is actually leveled against their God. God has actually done everything in their life that will enable them to live successfully and their reproach is actually leveled at him. It's a swipe across the face to Christ, it really is; they don't know it, but it is. It's a swipe across the face. "You haven't made any change in me, there's nothing can make any change in my life, I am miserable and I am determined to remain miserable." It's a reproach against Christ. That reproach has fallen on you as the helper at that moment. You are to bear that reproach as Jesus did bear our reproaches. You are to bear it kindly and gently and patiently and just be quiet if that's the right thing to be. But above all be loving, and the next opportunity that comes, try to build them up again and enable them to see that there is a power that is coming from Calvary that actually enables them to do all that they need to do.

Now, if you say to me, "Brother, that is super human, to keep on going like that again and again and again, that's impossible. How do you do that?" Loved ones, that's why this dear word is here, and if you just look at the next verse, it'll show you it. In Romans 15:4, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope." We'll spend some days that will probably go even after the Coffman Union services, discussing that verse, it's so great. But that's how. "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope." In other words, the specific reason for the existence of this book [the Bible] is to encourage and help you and me to do what thousands of men and women have done down through the centuries. When they were not able to do something themselves, and they were not able to bear or be patient any longer, they looked up to their God and he gave them the strength to be that.

And this book is written to produce that kind of life. Actually you'll be interested to know, the word for steadfastness there, is a Greek word called "hupomone" and that "mone" becomes our English word "remain". So it's to remain, and "hupo" is a Greek word "under", to remain under, and "hupomone" -- we translate it "patience" at times in the New Testament, but really that's a poor translation. It really means the readiness to remain under a thing. In fact here is the way one person put it, "Hupomone is a brave steady remaining under something. We sometimes call it perseverance; it is needed by those who are to carry the weaknesses of the weak. It is not enough to help them once or twice, we must remain under the load as long as the load is there." That's it. As long as that loved one is pessimistic, as long as that loved one has trouble putting a nail into a wall. As long as that loved one has trouble with doing their check stubs. As long as that loved one has some weakness that you have been delivered from, you've to remain under that weakness with them,

helping them, encouraging them until they come up and clear of that weakness. “Hupomone” is remaining under it as long as the load is there.

Actually, I should read the other sentence that the old Lutheran commentator adds. I was going to keep it from you, but you look a brave group this morning. He says, “It is not enough to help them once or twice, we must remain under the load as long as the load is there, new cases of weakness appear.” That’s it. We’re here to strengthen each other. We’re here to build each other up. There is not one of you, loved ones, in this room this morning who cannot live and do all that you are meant to live and do, really. There isn’t one of us here who cannot do all that our Creator has put us on earth here to do. You don’t have that ability yourself, I agree with you. But there is a mighty work that God did in you in Jesus and even if those are only words to you at this moment, believe it.

There is a mighty work, that God has done in his Son in eternity and that work can be manifested in your life and many of us have proved it so in our own lives, and you cannot only come clear of sin and evil, but you can come above weakness and that’s God’s desire for us. Our job as friends of friends is to bear each other’s weaknesses. To bear them, to carry the load, to bear them up, to build up our brothers and sisters, so that they eventually come into the strength that God has provided in Jesus for them. So, if you are looking forward to this week, and you know there are some weaknesses in your own character and your own life, I would encourage you to bring it before God just in these few minutes of prayer and tell him that you believe that he did free you from this in Christ and ask him to begin to bring the strength of that into your life this week. Just do that, begin now.