

Dear Phil

RICK WARREN'S A PURPOSE-DRIVEN LIFE

“What do you think about Rick Warren’s book *A Purpose-Driven Life*?  
—Anonymous

Dear Anonymous:

It’s interesting that you should ask. I bought Warren’s book for my wife a year ago at Christmas. Soon after, I heard some pretty scathing criticisms of the book from sources that are usually theologically on target. So I decided to read the book for myself and check it out. I’ve gotten only through chapter 11, so my review pertains only to the first 11 chapters and not to the entire book.

So far, the book has been quite good on the whole. One of the first things I noticed, though, was how many different translations Warren uses. The heavy use of paraphrastic versions (*The Message*, *NLT*, *Living Bible*) inclined me to think that Warren had picked and chosen the version that said what he wanted a verse to say. This was a bit annoying, but hardly a fatal flaw. After all, I know and appreciate the reasons for, and the uses of, a wide variety of translations. So, I just decided to skip reading his Scripture texts.

When I sat down to start actually writing my review of the book, I read his introduction—always a good idea! There I saw that he had an appendix in which he explains why he uses so many versions. He gives two main reasons: (1) every translation has its limitations—true enough,

though some are better than others; and (2) familiarity with a version often breeds inattention. The result: people miss the full impact of God’s message because they are so used to hearing it. Hard to argue with that! (One of the main benefits of reading the Bible in the original languages is that our unfamiliarity with Greek or Hebrew forces us to pay more attention to what is being said than when we read a familiar English version.) Having read the appendix, I started reading the Scripture in the book. At chapter 11, the jury is still out on whether Warren has really been fair to the text of Scripture or not. My hunch is that the verdict will be yes and no, but I won’t make that call till I’ve finished the book.

I remember the very first impression I had of *A Purpose-Driven Life* two years ago at Christmas. My Aunt Carol had the book with her, and I somewhat skeptically picked it up and read the first line of the first chapter, “It’s not about you.” Wow! What a powerful line! And Warren couldn’t be more right. Our origin, identity, meaning, purpose, destiny—they all originate and ultimate in God. Life is not about us; it’s about God. I can’t help but think that such an approach would revolutionize high school and college career

counseling. I remember my friends’ frustrated searches to find what they wanted to do in life. Warren is right on the money when he says that is the wrong approach to life. His three concluding insights from chapter one bear repeating: (1) Identity and purpose are found only through relationship with Jesus Christ; (2) God planned the purpose of your life in eternity; (3) your life’s purpose fits into the grand cosmic plan of God. Now that is something worth living for—yes, *Someone* worth dying for!

I ran into my first major snag in Warren’s theology in chapter seven. At the end of the chapter he invites sinners to Christ, and that is admirable. But in my estimation he fails to give them proper directions on how to come to Christ. He says that they must believe; but he doesn’t say they must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, or that He died for our sins and rose the third day. Both of those items are core components of the apostolic gospel. Frankly, I am not inclined to think that Warren purposefully left out mention of those two items, but I do find it disturbing that his call to sinners is defective. A defective call may lead to a defective faith, and a defective faith is not a saving faith. When we “believe in Jesus,” we’re not just believing facts about His deity or even His resurrection. We are believing that He is the only way to God, that His sacrifice is the only atonement God will accept, and that He is the only solution to our desperate need for salvation from the wrath of God we justly deserve.

I will continue this discussion when I’ve finished the book. Remember, It’s not about us. It’s all about God, His kingdom, and His glory.

Happy New Year!  
PHILIP ■

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