

Rick Warren and the ‘Purpose Driven’ Books

Rick Warren is pastor of the Saddleback Church in California and author of such best-selling books as *‘The Purpose Driven Church’* and *‘The Purpose Driven Life’*.

‘The Purpose Driven Church’:

Warren is well known for developing the ‘Church Growth Movement’ which uses marketing strategies including ‘seeker sensitive’ services that use techniques to attract the unchurched. In *‘The Purpose Driven Church’* Warren urges the churches to adopt contemporary music including Rock Music and to use business motivational techniques in order to fill the pews. This book majors in pragmatic methods and clearly sees *growth as fruit*. If it works and numbers are evident, then it must be good. One author wrote: *‘It is hard not to be impressed by this book; it is inspiring, challenging and full of practical ideas for ministry and evangelism. Yet it is interesting to again find that the use of the Bible in it is almost universally poor’*. (‘Briefing’, 7/99)

In the book and seminars, Warren cleverly sets up ‘strawmen’. For example, he says: *‘...we are loud. We are really really loud on a weekend service... I say, we're not gonna turn it down... baby boomers want to feel the music, not just hear it... why should every church have the same music?...People can find that God loves variety!’* The ‘straw man’ erected is that we all might want to have the same music and that God may not be keen on variety. The error is that we give the unsaved what appeals to their flesh. As in all his books, Warren flogs the strawman: *‘...to insist that all good music came from music 200 years ago is thinly veiled racism... it’s cultural elitism saying that all the good music was written 200 years ago... Now for 2,000 years the Holy Spirit has used all kinds of music. And to insist that one particular style of music is more sacred than the other, there is a word for that - its called idolatry’*. But has the Holy Spirit really ‘used all kinds of music’? The issue is not 18th Century hymns but rather - can music which gives a response in the flesh, be used in church? *‘Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh... If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit’*, (Gal.5:16-26). Are we not to worship God in the *‘beauty of holiness’*? (1Chr.16:29); and not be conformed to the world, (Rom.12:2)?

‘The Purpose Driven Life’:

The *‘Purpose Driven Life’* and the *‘Forty Days of Purpose’* programmes are based on Warren’s premise (P.9,10) that *‘Today the average life span is 25,550 days... don’t you think it would be wise use of time to set aside 40 of those days to figure out what God wants you to do with the rest of them? The Bible is clear that God considers 40 days a spiritual significant time period. Whenever God wanted to prepare someone for his purposes, he took 40 days: Noah’s life was transformed by 40 days of rain. Moses was transformed by 40 days on Mt. Sinai. The spies were transformed by 40 days in the promised land. David was transformed by Goliath’s 40 day challenge. Elijah was transformed when God gave him 40 days of strength from a single meal. The entire city of Ninevah was transformed when God gave the people 40 days to change. Jesus was empowered by 40 days in the wilderness. The disciples were transformed by 40 days with Jesus after the resurrection. The next 40 days will change your life...’*

But how many readers will test such claims?: *‘Noah’s life was transformed by 40 days of rain’*?: There is absolutely nothing in Genesis to support this statement! The flood was more than 40 days, (Gen.7:24). Where was Noah’s life ‘transformed’ by the 40 days of rain?

‘Moses was transformed by 40 days on Mount Sinai’?: Moses was arguably ‘transformed’ at Mt. Sinai but not in those 40 days! It was actually during his first encounter with God before he returned to Egypt. Moses spent 80 days on the Mount the second time.

‘The spies were transformed by 40 days’?: Ten of the spies came back fearful! Only two were arguably ‘transformed’. *‘David was transformed’?*:

David was there for more like 40 minutes than 40 days! The Israelites were ‘transformed’ into fearful wrecks!

‘Elijah was transformed...40 days of strength from a single meal’?: Elijah had two meals. He was hardly ‘transformed’ when he ran from Jezebel.

‘Ninevah was transformed’?: Arguably true?

‘Jesus was empowered by 40 days in the wilderness’?: Where was Jesus ‘empowered’? He was hungry and returned from the wilderness ‘in the power of the spirit’, (Lk.4:14).

‘The disciples were transformed’?: Arguably they were ‘transformed’ after Jesus ascension.

Warren starts with a premise, then goes to Scripture to find supporting verses. But if the reader accepts Warren’s premise (*‘WHENEVER God wants to prepare someone for his purposes, he took 40 days’*)...then what about Abraham, Job, Isaac, Jacob, Samuel, Paul - were they ‘transformed’ by 40 days also? What about the generation of Israel that were dead after 40 years in wilderness?

The material in much of Warren’s books is good and basic. There is nothing wrong in encouraging people to set aside 40 days but *why misinterpret scripture*, (2Tim.2:15)? Warren’s material has become popular because of *the way it is put*. There are many ‘strawmen’ and much extra-Biblical thinking which ‘tickles the ears’ of people. The popularity of Rick Warren’s teaching says much about the state of the Church!

The Root of the Problem:

Warren’s exegesis of scripture is deceptive. An example of this is a sermon by Warren: *‘What the Bible Says About the Role of Women’*. In Genesis 3:16 Warren exchanges the word ‘rule’ for ‘dominate’; he says Lydia in Acts 16 ‘hosted a church in her home’; Chloe (1Cor.1:11) was a ‘small group leader’; Phoebe (Rom.16:1) was a ‘leader in the church’. All these claims cannot be derived by exegesis of the texts. Warren turns 1Timothy 3:11 completely on its head and says: *‘it sounds like the wives of deacons should have these qualifications [for a deaconess]’*. Yet the passage is clearly referring to *qualifications for husbands*! Warren later flatly contradicts himself when he says ‘women cannot be elders’! Yet the qualification of ‘husband of one wife’ is the same wording for both elders and deacons! Amazingly he then says *‘There were obviously women leaders in the church...’* But this premise has been derived at by *speculation and false interpretation*!

Terry Arnold

A helpful booklet is: *‘An Analysis of Rick Warren’s ‘The Purpose Driven Life’*, on our website.

Critiques can also be found at: <http://www.biblebb.com/files/pdl.htm>

Source: *‘The Purpose Driven Claim’* by Don Veinot & Pastor Mike Mahurin, MCOI Journal Summer, 2004.