

Can You Tell Me? Rick Warren

Question: *Saddleback minister Rick Warren's book, Purpose Driven Life has been on the best-seller's list for over 100 weeks and a million-plus copies have been sold. What do you make of this phenomenon, of the philosophy he presents to his readers, and the affects it might have on the Church in the years ahead?*

Answer: *Time Magazine* (Dec.27, 2004) reported that spirituality sold well in 2004, but few did better than Pastor Rick and "his faith-based self-help book *Purpose-Driven Life*, which hit 20 million copies sold."

Rick Warren, the founding past of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, one of America's largest megachurches, is a fourth-generation Baptist with a congregationalist view of the church. He rejects infant baptism and consequently the golden thread of the covenant, which runs through Scripture. He reflects the North American market-driven therapeutic society. This economic, individualistic, youth-oriented society places high value on youthful appearance and physical vigour and low value on life experiences and wrinkles. It has impacted evangelicalism and contributed to the rapid growth of seeker-sensitive megachurches. These churches target a specific age, racial, or an economic group. In fact, seeker churches have set the standard for "the American religious landscape."

Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life* sends mixed messages. If it is for Christians then they swallow a lot of Scripture twisting along with the message. If it is a book for non-Christians, it fails to present a clear Gospel message. It asks the reader to receive Christ, but it does not mention sin, repentance, or even the cross. Warren minimizes the importance of doctrine and glosses over doctrinal differences. He never warns believers to watch out for false doctrine. He also supplements Scripture with self-help advice. On the one hand he repeatedly rejects psychobabble but on the other hand, he immerses his readers in it. He claims that "most conflict is rooted in unmet needs." But Christ did not come to meet unmet needs. The Bible describes man as a sinner in need of salvation. Warren's use of Scripture raises many questions. To get his message across Warren used fifteen different translations and paraphrases. He uses various translations and paraphrases to prove his point, but they often fail to relate even remotely to the meaning of the underlying Hebrew or Greek text. He either takes passages out of context or simply misinterprets them or finds a translation of paraphrases that back his claim. His method leads to a careless and wanton mishandling of Scripture. For example, Warren cites several times Jeremiah 29: 11, using the New Century Version. He comments, "Wonderful changes are going to happen in your life as you begin to live it on purpose. God says, 'I know what I am planning for you. I will give you hope and a good future.'" But this verse has nothing to say whatsoever about the wonderful changes that will occur in a believer once he lives out his purpose. This text refers to the people of Israel in Babylonian captivity. It is not a general promise for all people at all times.

Will Warren's church-growth philosophy have a lasting impact? Church history shows that fads and trends come and go. I believe that a day will come when North American culture

will no longer be described as a youth culture. The local church will become intergenerational, interracial, young and old and in-between, rich and poor, worshipping the Lord, reflecting the make-up to God's covenant people.

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