



The Reason Driven Life: What Am I Here on Earth For?

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Pastor Rick Warren's "The Purpose-Driven Life" has been both a commercially successful best seller and a widely influential book in the Christian community. As a rejoinder to the fundamentalist assumptions of Warren's book, Robert Price, a biblical scholar, a member of the Jesus Seminar, and a former liberal Baptist pastor, offers this witty, thoughtful, and detailed critique. Following the concise forty-chapter structure of Warren's book, Price's point-counterpoint approach emphasizes the importance of reason in understanding life's realities as opposed to Warren's devotional perspective. Price, who was once a born-again Christian in his youth, is in a unique position to offer an appreciation of the wisdom that Warren shares while at the same time challenging many of his main points. In particular, Price takes issue with Warren's use of numerous scriptural quotations, demonstrating how many of them have little to do with the points Warren is trying to make. An important section of the book shows that the popular evangelical notion of 'a personal relationship with Jesus Christ' is utterly without any scriptural basis. Besides criticism, Price also provides many persuasive arguments for the use of reason as a tool for developing moral maturity and an intelligent, realistic perspective on life's highs and lows. Ultimately, the reason-driven life offers a healthier, alternative approach to wisdom and motivation, says Price, than the simplistic answers and feel-good emotionalism at the heart of Warren's prescription for life.

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From Reader Review *The Reason Driven Life: What Am I Here on Earth For?* for online ebook

Skylar Burris says

This book might have been more enjoyable if it were a tongue-and-cheek response to Rick Warren's somewhat insipid *Purpose Driven Life*. Instead, despite its occasional laugh-out-loud moments, it is a book written largely in deadly earnest. Robert Price is on a mission to debunk evangelical Christianity while offering atheists and agnostics a meaningful replacement (because he thinks atheism is too negative and defines itself too much by what it is not rather than by what it is). He follows the model of the *Purpose Driven Life* to a tee, complete with beginning quotations, points to ponder, and questions to consider.

Price is a former Christian fundamentalist himself, and like so many Christian fundamentalists who lose their faith, he doesn't quite lose his fundamentalism. He claims to be more open-minded now, of course, arguing that the book is just offering a point of view for you to think about and that he doesn't really care whether or not he succeeds in convincing you that Christianity in particular (and traditional religion in general) is a pack of lies. He's not like these atheists who are themselves zealots who simply turn their zeal against religion. He's not trying to PERSUADE you to think anything. He's just written a book detailing his arguments in favor of a particular position. (Why would you think that was an attempt at convincing you that he's right about something?) And yet, despite being a kinder, gentler zealot (and he is, when you compare him to Hitchens, Dawkins, et. al.) , he does manage to make quite a few self-assured statements, in the spirit of any fundamentalist. Take this: "Maturity depends on realizing there is no Creator, no divine lawgiver, no author of destiny and meaning, and no giver of eternal life." He's the friendly atheist evangelical. He's got good reasons why you're wrong and shouldn't seek God's will, and he loves the immature while hating the immaturity.

He makes some pretty fair criticisms of evangelical Christianity in general and of Rick Warren's work in particular. But he also paints with broad strokes, fails to realize the diversity within evangelical Christianity (there are evangelicals who have issues with Warren's theology too), and overlooks the flaws in his own logic. I didn't follow his reason much of the time. Maybe it's because I'm one of those immature God-believing types, or maybe his analogies are just poor. Take his idea that the belief in a Creator-God takes the wonder out of the world because it is like watching a TV documentary on special effects that exposes how it was done, leaving you feeling down – oh, that's how they did it. Ummm....reading the creation poem of Genesis has moved me in many ways, but it's never moved me to think, "Oh, that's how he did it." Mainly because, you know, it never says in any detail how he did it. Science is far more like a documentary on special effects than is religious literature. I just didn't know where he was going with his arguments sometimes. "I'm not trying to get you to agree with me," he says (in a book with specific arguments in support of a specific point of view). "That wouldn't be rational." Ummm...What exactly is irrational about trying to persuade someone to agree with you? True, it might not work, but that doesn't make the attempt irrational per say. In fact, persuasion requires the exercise of a great many reasoning faculties.

Anyway, I ended up skimming this, just as I ended up skimming Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life*. *The Reason Driven Life* is the better written and more entertaining of the two, but I don't really care for either author's "theology."

Lynn says

I haven't read Rick Warren's book, but I'm sure this one is probably better, and I didn't even enjoy it all that much; possibly because it is geared to those who are looking for a way to break away from their religious indoctrinations. I never had to deal with that problem.

In addition, the writing style didn't keep my interest.

Reggia says

definitely coming back to this

Liz Brau says

this is pretty boring to me. i thought it would give me some things to realize or re-examine about some stuff, but it's not all that. it is an evangelizing book geared towards rescuing (or logicking?) people who are fundamentalist christians. i read a couple chapters of "purpose driven life" and was sufficiently freaked out.

Dana O'brien says

This book is written by Robert Price, a current biblical scholar and ex-baptist pastor as a counter to Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life*. He writes with a great sense of humor and ... "Price also provides many persuasive arguments for the use of reason as a tool for developing moral maturity and an intelligent, realistic perspective on life's highs and lows. Ultimately, the reason-driven life offers a healthier, alternative approach to wisdom and motivation, says Price, than the simplistic answers and feel-good emotionalism at the heart of Warren's prescription for life."

Christopher Stryker says

All and all, it was a gratifying read. Several times I found my mind wondering a little, but then the author would make a point that really rang true to me: he had quite the knack for rewording fundamentalist sentiments I thought I understood, and really forcing me to view certain propositions in a new light. The title was a little misleading however, as I was prepared to enjoy what I believed would be a sort of manifesto on a reason-centered life, but instead found myself engaged in a chapter-by-chapter critique of Rick Warren's book.

D.J. says

Price has an amazing knowledge of ancient religious history and the Bible. He uses that, as well as a profound understanding of people and their inherent goodness, to refute *The Purpose Driven Life* chapter by chapter and point by point.

David says

Bob Price is always fun and thought provoking, particularly when rebutting the mistaken ideas by moderns with something to sell you on the spiritual insights of ancient people in Palestine. In this case the vacuous nature of the 19th century invention of fundamentalist thinking is clearly revealed. In a series of short chapters the spiritual insights of the ancients is understood and respected, while Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life* is properly questioned and found wanting when compared to the history of the faith it claims to reflect.

Colin says

So, this book was written as a rebuttal and polemic against Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life*. Having never read Warren's book, I was at somewhat of a disadvantage, but I think Price makes his counter-case reasonably well: One's life decisions should be dictated by reason. Rick Warren's fundamentalist Christian "purpose" is not a valid guide to life, as it doesn't stand up to even cursory inspection, let alone scrutiny - everything I have read or heard of Warren's philosophy bears this out. Now, I am not speaking against Christianity as a valid way of life - only Warren's vision of what it means (which, as far as I can tell, is nothing like Jesus' vision of what it means).

Charles says

This book was really enjoyable, and honestly pretty inspirational too. While I expected it to be a well thought out rebuttal of Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* specifically and fundamentalist Christian pop-theology in general, which it was, I was pleasantly surprised by all the positive philosophy and food for thought that Price offers as alternatives.

KevinS says

This book is a rebuttal to a popular religious book from a while back called 'The Purpose Driven Life' by Rick Warren. Apparently Rick's book was so filled with glurge and religiosity and plain illogic that Robert couldn't stand it, so in this book he picks that book apart one chapter at a time and offers more rational alternatives (40 chapters). Mostly this book offers closer readings of the bible to refute most of the fundamentalist protestant teachings in the first book. So I found the viewpoint here refreshing, with some thought-provoking arguments against some of the religious teachings I grew up with. I did not find it necessary to read Rick Warren's book first. But because this book is argumentative, each chapter I found myself judging whether I agree with Rick, whether I agree with Robert, or whether the argument is too petty or esoteric for me to care about.

David says

A great read by an author who is second to none on the history of the Bible. This is Robert Price's follow up to Rick Warren's "The Purpose Driven Life" with a critical look at Warren's assumptions and conclusions.

Elisabeth says

This book was very easy to read. I come from an evangelical background - catholic, protestant, and mormon. And, I'm at a point where I'm critically evaluating my faith.

I didn't read Reverend Warren's Purpose Driven Life, but it's not a pre-requisite for this book. Price doesn't criticize the Bible or Christianity. Instead he looks at the actions of many fundamentalist Christians of which I was at one point. A lot of what he says rings true with me, and some of what he says actually matches some of the teachings I've heard at the various churches I've attended.

I do have some criticisms for the book.

First, he explains if someone looks at the world as though it were created, you become more focused on the creator than on the creation. That has never been my experience. I have always been in awe of the world and have constantly searched for more intricacies of living things of which to be in awe. Yes, I more or less believe the world was created, but I never put more emphasis on God being the creator. I might be the exception. I don't know.

Second, he describes a worship service as a type of nirvana and argues that both Christians and non-Christians can enjoy this nirvana experience and then continue with their lives without trying to keep that "mountain top experience" an ongoing thing in their lives. Well, that's great for the attendees, but what about the pastor and the worship leader and other church administrators? They certainly have to prepare on a weekly basis, and I'm sure they don't see a once weekly service as a once a week thing. So, it's okay for some to see Church as a "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas", but not for others?

Last, he argues against the various new translations of the Bible saying that most are inline with a certain fundamentalist's interpretation, and not necessarily the original wording of the Bible. I can agree with Price that man is fallible, and we shouldn't automatically accept another man's interpretation of the word of God, whether that be a pastor or a friend. However, in arguing against accepting another's interpretation of the Bible, Price is giving us his own interpretation. I'm not sure if he realizes this! He does share a quote though that has become my favorite. From Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: "If God held all truth in His right hand and in His left the everlasting striving after truth, with the risk that I should always and everlastingly be mistaken, and said to me 'Choose!' In humility I would pick the left hand and say, 'Father grant me that: Absolute truth is for thee alone.'"

Overall, though, I enjoyed this book. It gave me a lot to think about and offered a lot of resources for further reading such as Bonhoeffer, Lessing, Quebedeaux, Rokeach, Schonfield, and Babinski. I should receive Bonhoeffer's book, "Letters and Papers from Prison" shortly.

Mike DiFilippo says

A bright and thoughtful exploration of the realities of life by a biblical scholar who uses the wisdom of the bible as it was written. He contrasts his assessments with those of Rick Warren and as a former evangelical Price tells of a moving personal story.

Sharon says

An eye-opening book from a theologian on just why the fundamentalist viewpoint isn't even good theology, yet alone a sane way to want to interpret life and the universe. My only complaint is that this book starts off as a book for someone who wants to use reason to figure out their life's path, but it slowly becomes a book for those who still want to be religious, just not fundamentalists.

Great introduction to the points against accepting christianity, or at least fundamentalism. Price's big problem with christianity is the dogma as hell, which i don't blame him for, and he goes thru the conflicts, even within religious beliefs about dogma, to show that there is no way for religion to conclusively or exclusively answer life's big questions.
