

The Meaning of Life

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[0 : 00] We all love a good story, don't we? That's one of the things that unites us all. No matter who we are, what our particular interests are, we all love a good story.

Whether that's reading a book, or maybe if you're not a reader, watching a Netflix series, or watching a movie. The things that make those watchable and readable and good and that attract us to them is that they're stories of people.

They're people's stories. We get deep fulfillment in watching or listening to other people's stories. Even if we don't know them from a bar of soap, random people, but when we hear their stories, we get drawn into them.

We resonate with people's stories. But one of the things we all need when we're hearing or watching people's stories is for them to have a conclusion.

For them to have some kind of purpose or meaning. So, you know, you're not going to, if there's a good movie that you're in, you're not going to be happy to just stop halfway and go, Well, that was a good half movie. I'm satisfied with that.

[1 : 02] No, we need to watch it to the end, right? We need to see the conclusion of the story we're watching. If you're in a good book, you're not going to stop halfway and be satisfied with that.

No, we've got this deep, innate desire to find the conclusion to the stories that we're watching. For them to have purpose, for them to have meaning.

Why is that? Well, perhaps the reason is that it's very easy in this life to feel that our own stories don't have that.

That each of the stories we're living out, we struggle maybe to find their conclusion or their meaning or their purpose. And so we love watching stories of other people that have some kind of conclusion to convince us, Well, perhaps our own stories have a good ending.

Perhaps our own stories have a meaning behind them. But we all feel, well, sometimes it's easy to feel that as we're going through the humdrum routines of life, it's easy to feel that we're not going anywhere particular, right?

[2 : 13] Maybe this resonates with you. Maybe you've just been going to your job every day. You wake up, you go to your job. You come home. You maybe have a weekend where you can do something fun.

You have a holiday where you can recharge to go back to work and just do the same thing over again. And it seems every year you're doing the same stuff and you're just getting older and it's getting a little bit more painful to do it.

And maybe you stop and ask, well, what's the purpose of it all? Well, that's why we need the Bible. That's why we need the Bible.

Because the Bible, one of the many things the Bible does for us is that it reveals a bigger story. A bigger story than our own little stories. And this bigger story that we learn in the Bible starts to make sense of our little stories.

It helps us to realize the purpose that we have. That's one of the reasons I was attracted to the Bible as a young adult. And one of the reasons I came to read it and believe in what it says.

[3 : 19] Is because I realized that it paints a much bigger picture of life that makes sense of my own life. And over the next three sermons, over the next three weeks, we're going to be looking at that big story.

And how understanding that big story actually answers the questions we have of life. The questions we have of our lives. And today we're going to start by asking possibly the biggest question that's ever been asked by human beings.

Which is, well, what is our purpose? Why are we here? Why are we here? Why are we here? Now a lot of people, now I don't know if maybe you've got an answer for that in your mind.

Maybe you've come to your conclusion of why we're here. But a lot of people don't believe there is actually any set purpose. A lot of people in our world today especially believe that all of this came about randomly.

That it came through some cosmic accident with random forces at play. No intent behind it. No mind behind it. And we all just somehow became what we are.

[4 : 27] And with all our complex bodies and functions and minds and all the complexities of creation. It just happened to become this way from some primordial soup randomly by chance.

A lot of people actually believe that. Which means, if you believe that, then it means that we don't have any set purpose. Life is what we make it. And we just live out whatever we feel we want to. Because there's no real reason for us to be here. Just be happy as much as you can before you die. That's essentially our purpose. If you can even call it a purpose. Because if we just randomly created, not even created, just randomly exist.

Then there is no purpose. We're just here. But that's not what the Bible reveals. The Bible reveals the very opposite of that. The Bible reveals that we were intentionally made. That all of this was intentionally made.

And because it was intentionally made by a creator, there is a purpose for it. Everything. There's a purpose for everything in creation. There's a set purpose for it.

[5 : 33] There's a reason that it's there. What is that purpose according to the Bible? That's a very important question. If God made all this and it's got a purpose, what is that purpose?

Well, the Bible is very clear. Once you start reading it, you realize quite soon what the purpose of it all is. And we've already heard it. Earlier in Psalm 19, the very first verse of Psalm 19, reminds us of the purpose of all of this, of creation.

And you'll find this repeated over and over again in Scripture. But let me read to you Psalm 19, verse 1. The heavens declare the glory of God. There's the purpose.

That's what the heavens and all of the other parts of creation are there to do, according to the Bible. To declare the glory of God.

It's created. That's its purpose. Of everything that is created. And the New Testament says the same thing. Romans 1, verse 20, for example, says, For God's invisible attributes are understood through what He has made.

[6 : 43] So the point is, all of visible creation, all of the things we can see, all matter, all of the things that are made out of matter exist to reveal something about the invisible God.

Because God is, by nature, invisible. He's not made of matter. So He creates this universe made of matter to express Himself. I don't know how you like expressing yourself.

Maybe it's through music or art. Everybody's got a certain way of expressing themselves. Maybe through poetry. Well, this is God's way of expressing Himself.

This creation. The stars. The mountains. The animals. The vast savannas. The ocean. The vast savannas. Storms. This is God expressing Himself.

The invisible God expressing Himself through a visible creation. And that's what it's here for. Visible creation is made to reveal something about the invisible God.

[7 : 45] It's an expression of God. It's the natural overflow of who He is. It's almost like He couldn't help but create things to express who He is.

Just like art is an expression of the artist. You know, when you look at art, it's got a particular style because of the particular artist who made it.

And that's the artist expressing themselves through art. Well, that's what creation is doing. That is what God is doing through creation according to the Bible. He is expressing Himself through this.

Through what He's created. But we are part of that creation. We are created beings. Much as we don't like to think of ourselves like that, we are creatures.

We are part of this physical world. Which means we exist for the same purpose as everything else. You and me. We exist for the same purpose. To declare the glory of God.

[8 : 44] We exist to express who God is. To glorify Him. That's what the Bible teaches.

But, it goes on and it teaches us that we exist as opposed to everything else in creation. Humans are different. We exist because we are to declare God's glory in a way that the other things in creation can't.

And we read this starting in Genesis 1. The passage Alan read for us earlier. I'll read it again from Genesis 1, 26 and 27.

We're out at creation. We learn this and this is different. This is how humans are different from all other creatures. God said, let us make mankind in our image.

And so, God created mankind in His own image. Nothing else in all creation is created in the image of God but humans.

[9 : 48] Now, we are still part of the creation and so our purpose is the same as the rest of creation. To declare the glory of God. And yet, we are made in God's image to do that in a different way to the rest of creation.

What does that mean for us? It's an important question. What does it mean for you and me that we are created in the image of God? What does it mean for our purpose? Well, let me explain it this way.

There's a museum in Amsterdam, in Holland, which is devoted to the works of Vincent van Gogh. Vincent van Gogh was a painter, as you probably know.

A Dutch painter. And it is van Gogh, not van Gogh, like the Americans like to say because they can't do the guttrills. It's Vincent van Gogh. Actually, I watched a documentary. It's Vincent van Gogh.

But Gogh is fine for now. Vincent van Gogh. He was a painter. A Dutch painter. And in Amsterdam, there's a museum devoted to his paintings. And as you go into this museum, you see his amazing paintings.

[10 : 58] And all of them express something of him. Just like all paintings do of the painter. They express a part of Vincent van Gogh. As you walk through and you see the different paintings and the different styles.

They're speaking to you of him. They're him expressing himself to you, even hundreds of years later. They're an expression. They display something of the artist.

And in the same way, creation, the waterfalls, the mountains, the sunsets, the vastness of space. Those all express something of God. It's creator. They express his eternity, his power, his majesty, his beauty. All of the different elements of creation are expressing something of God as we look at them.

But in this Vincent van Gogh museum, if you walk a little bit further into another room, you come across another type of painting. Vincent's self-portraits.

[12 : 01] And these paintings actually show you what Vincent van Gogh is like in a way that all the other paintings can't. Because they show you what he's actually like in a much more detailed way.

Well, that, fellow human beings, is what we are here for. That's what we are here for. We are here, humans, are here to show off who our creator is in ways that his other works can't.

Humans. When we are at our best. When we create beautiful things. And we love in selfless ways. We are declaring the glory of our creator. We are showing off the character of God in ways that even the stars and the mountains and the sunsets can't.

That's what we're here for. That's our purpose. That's your purpose. Now, you may have noticed we're not doing a very good job of it.

[13 : 10] And we'll get to why in a minute. Because the Bible explains that as well. But before we do, I want you just to pause and think about what we've considered so far.

Because the implication of this, the implication of our purpose, as the Bible reveals, is a profound one. It's simple, but it's profound. And it's something that if we grasp will change our lives.

And that is that you exist for God's glory. He does not exist for you. This is a key truth we need to understand.

You exist. I exist. For God. For His purpose. He does not exist for you. He does not exist for me. And yet the truth is that so many people think that He does.

So many people have that view of God. They think that God is there for us. Even those who believe in God and who come to church tend to assume that God is there to help us live our lives.

[14 : 25] And pursue our purposes. And so we treat Him that way. And we pray that He will help us. That He will get on board with our life. And that He will help us to do what we're doing.

Because we assume that's what He's there for. Like some big nanny in the sky. Or a butler. We wouldn't say it. We wouldn't consciously admit it.

But that's often how we treat God. That He's there to help us. That's His purpose. He's our big helper. When we need help with things. Then we go to God.

That He exists for us. And the reason we tend to that is because we can't help feeling that we are the center of our existence.

I mean, that is the natural human perspective. From the moment we're born, you open your eyes as a little baby. And you perceive that everything, life happens around you.

[15 : 21] You know? Life happens around you. All the people in the world and all the people, they're circling around you. So our natural tendency is to think we're in the center of our lives.

We might not consciously realize that, but that's what we think. That life happens around us. And so what that means is that the world is comprised of billions of people who are each the center of their own little solar system.

Right? That is what our world is. A bunch of people who sometimes knock into each other and sometimes incorporate each other's solar systems into their lives.

But we're all, by nature, the center of our own little solar systems walking around in this world. That is the default.

But that is not the picture that the Bible paints of why we exist. Do you see the difference between what we think by nature and what the Bible says we exist for?

[16 : 25] There's a huge difference between the two. And that is why we all, at some point in our lives, you may have gone through this already or you may have yet to go through this.

But at some point in our lives, every single person needs what is commonly called a Copernican revolution. A Copernican revolution.

What is a Copernican revolution? Well, it's named after a Polish astronomer called Nicholas Copernicus. I don't know if you've ever heard of him, but he lived in the 1500s. And in the 1500s, that was a time when people believed that the sun and the stars all revolved around the earth.

Right? All the things in space that revolved around the earth and the earth was the center. That's what people believed for centuries and centuries. Why? Because it looks like that. Right? That's when you look at the sunrise and go across the sky and set and you look at the stars and it looks like everything's revolving around us.

Around earth. Right? And so for hundreds of years, that's the model that they had. A geocentrism it was called. Where everything revolves around the earth.

[17 : 36] Because that's what it looks like from our perspective. But Copernicus did his maths and he did his work and he was a very clever astronomer. And he discovered, oh, actually that's not how it is.

We revolve around the sun. We're just another planet like all the rest of them. And so he put this in a thesis and he proposed it.

And you see, just as he came to that realization about our world in the solar system, we need to come to that realization about our lives.

About ourselves. We all need to come to the point, if we're going to ever live the lives that we were made for, if we're ever going to discover and live out our purpose in life, we first need to come to the point of realizing we are not in the center.

That our lives are not about us. Now people were very upset with Nicholas Copernicus.

[18 : 43] He caused a lot of ruckus in the scientific community. And it took people a long time, a couple of generations, before it was generally accepted that his hypothesis was correct.

It took people a long time to accept that we're not the center. Because people didn't like that idea. People didn't like the idea that we're not in the middle of things.

And you know, in the same way, neither do we. When we start to discover this truth in the Bible, we don't like that idea that we're not in the center. We don't like the idea that God doesn't exist for us.

That God made everything to glorify himself. Even when I say that now, it rubs up against you, doesn't it? It doesn't feel right. God made everything to glorify him.

God made everything to glorify him. God made everything to glorify him. God made all that exists so he can be praised. It doesn't sound right. We don't like that idea. People get upset with that.

[19 : 56] I read an interview years ago of Brad Pitt, the movie star. He grew up a Christian. But he's no longer a Christian. And they were asking him why he changed from his childhood beliefs.

And he said this, and I quote, I didn't understand this idea of a God who says, you have to acknowledge me. You have to say that I'm the best. And then I'll give you eternal happiness.

If you won't, then you don't get it. It seemed to me to be all about ego. And so, because of this egotistical God who made everything to praise him, Brad Pitt and many, you know, didn't like that idea of God.

C.S. Lewis, before becoming a Christian, wrote that God sounded like a vain woman who wants compliments. Maybe you think that about God.

As I'm saying this, and as we're seeing what the Bible says, maybe you think you wouldn't want to worship a God who made everything to glorify himself.

[21 : 08] That doesn't sound right. But you see, what we don't realize, what Brad Pitt doesn't realize, what C.S. Lewis only came to realize later when he became a Christian, is that it is in our best interests for God to glorify himself.

Because God's glory is the best thing for us. I mean, think of the things you enjoy in life, right? Food. Good food. Wine. Relationships. Friendships. Going on holiday. And going to new places. Discovering new places. The things that really make you happy. Think of those things. Well, you know, all of those things that you enjoy, parts of creation that you enjoy, are all from God to express His glory.

They are all declaring the glory of God. Right? Psalm 19 verse 1. All of the things you enjoy are actually declaring to you God's glory. That's why you enjoy them. Now, think of this.

[22 : 19] If our greatest joys are actually all just expressions of who God is, then He is the one we're actually enjoying, even if we don't realize it. You're enjoying God.

You're enjoying these things because God is glorifying Himself. Your happiness, all the little bits of happiness you have in your life, you have because God is glorifying Himself.

So you should be thankful God is glorifying Himself. You should be thankful that God has created this whole universe to glorify Himself. Because it's what makes you happy.

As someone else wrote, God is the only being for whom self-exaltation is the most loving act. God is the only being for whom self-exaltation is the most loving act.

And that is why God pursuing His own glory and doing everything for His praise and His glory is not out of pride, but it's out of love for you and me that He does that.

[23 : 27] He loves us, what He's made, so much that He wants to give us the greatest thing He can and that is His own glory. And that's why He makes everything so that it can glorify Him for our greatest happiness.

That's why it's all about Him. And when it's all about Him, that's when we find meaning. When our lives start to get in line with that and our lives become all about Him, that's when we find fulfillment that we can't find elsewhere.

And also, because of that, because the universe is made and we are all made for the glory of God, that makes each of our ability to glorify God in our lives the greatest thing about our lives.

The greatest thing about your life is not that you're a father or that you're a successful businessman or that you've made sport successes.

The greatest thing about your life, according to what we're reading in the Bible, is that you can glorify God somehow. You can image Him. Now, because of sin, we don't do that by default and we don't do it very well.

[24 : 52] Well, and the whole story of the Bible is telling us how we can come back into that, so you need to come back and learn more. But your ability to glorify God is the greatest thing about your life.

And so, why is it so difficult to do that? What went wrong? What went wrong? Well, the Bible describes that too. It explains to us what went wrong.

And you can sum it up in a word. Pride. Pride. You thought I was going to say sin, didn't you? Pride. Because what we realize is that that's the root of sin.

That's how sin starts. When we reject God's glory as the greatest thing in our lives, and then we instead make ourselves the greatest thing in our lives. that's where it all goes wrong.

And that's exactly what happened in Eden, in the third chapter of the Bible, right at the beginning, in the fall of mankind. We decided that instead of being images of God in creation, we wanted to replace God with ourselves.

[26 : 03] And that's exactly what the serpent tapped into, didn't he? When he first tempted us to sin, he said, you can be like God. Don't you want to be like God?

Not just imaging God, but being God yourself. Being the God of your own life. Being in the center. Don't you want to be in the center? That's the root of sin.

The desire to be in the center. And we've been doing that ever since. Ever since. We've been living to glorify ourselves instead of God.

That is our default. We are born into that. We do that by default. We live to glorify ourselves instead of God. And that is the true nature of sin. That is what sin actually is at its heart.

You know, you may have heard of preachers like me talking about sin. And you think, what do you think sin is? Breaking the rules. Doing naughty things.

[27 : 02] But it's not that. The heart of sin, the true nature of sin is simply putting ourselves in the center. Putting ourselves where God belongs.

And that's the reason we have all the problems we have. It really is. The reason that we have all the problems in this world is because this world is full of people who are in the center of their own solar systems.

The reason we have problems in marriage is because it's two people who are in the center trying to live together. The reason we have problems in, you know, politics and in wars is because it's people who think they're in the center who are trying to take over land from other people who are on the periphery.

Because everybody thinks they're in the center. And everybody is trying to get their own glory. And that is why we have all the problems we have in the world. But that is also why we are so unsatisfied.

That's why we struggle so much to be fulfilled. Don't we? We chase after so much stuff to try to be truly happy, to try to be satisfied, to try to be fulfilled.

[28 : 17] And yet we still, no matter what, how much we've got, no matter how much we accumulate, we still can't get satisfied. Why? Because true satisfaction is only found in God's glory.

The whole creation is made that way. He made us to only be truly satisfied in experiencing His glory. And He made us to only find our true purpose when we are living for His glory.

And that's why we will never be satisfied with anything less than God's glory. You will never be satisfied with anything less than God's glory. You will never be satisfied living for yourself.

I'm going to save you a lot of pain by telling you that now. Don't think that living for yourself is going to eventually make you happy. It won't. Because you were made to only be happy and fulfilled when you are living for God and His glory.

When you are not in the center. And you know what? the Bible doesn't end there by telling us what the problem is. It also goes on to tell us the solution.

[29 : 28] We'll find out more about that next week. But it reveals to us God's plan of salvation. And what we discover is that living in the center, living for ourselves, is the very thing God wants to save us from.

salvation is not just being saved from sin. It is being saved from living for ourselves. Being saved back to our original purpose of living lives that glorify God.

We can't do that just by some force of our will. Our ingrained desire to live for ourself and be the center is too strong. That's why God has to intervene and Jesus has to come to save us from that.

To save us from being in the center. Listen to how the Apostle Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 5 verse 15. He died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves.

That's according to Paul here why Jesus died. So that we don't have to live for ourselves. That we can live for something more.

[30 : 49] That is true salvation. Being rescued from living for ourselves and living to glorify God again. Have you been saved from that yet?

I'm not asking have you been saved in some generic way. I'm not asking have you been saved from sins. I'm not asking if you believe that your sins are forgiven. I'm asking have you been saved from living for yourself yet?

Are you living in a way that images God? Are you living every day where you ask how can I live today to glorify God because that's why I'm here.

because if you're not doing that if you're not glorifying God in any way in your life if you're just glorifying yourself if you're not glorifying God then and I mean this in the nicest way your life is meaningless.

Your life is meaningless if you're not glorifying your creator because that's why you were made. and so come come come come to Christ come to discover the joy and the rest and the meaning and the fulfillment that is found when you put yourself aside and you start living for the glory of God and you realize that is the key that unlocks everything when you realize that's why we're here and you start living for the glory of God rather than for your own glory and you step out of your own little story and you step into God's big story.

[32 : 44] We'll come back next week to find out what Jesus did so that you can do that but now let's pray. Create a God Lord we praise you we bless you we thank you for this revelation from your word that we have a purpose and that purpose is your glory Lord would you help us to tell our own souls that while we seek for ourselves and by default we're in the center of our lives Lord thank you for revealing to us the alternative that that's not what we were made for that we were made to have you in the center we're made to glorify you and Lord would you help us to be convinced of that help us to through Christ live lives where we are every day seeking how we can speak and live and act in a way that glorifies you our creator and Lord help us to realize and find the true fulfillment and joy that is found when we live for the reason you made us in Jesus name we pray

Amen