

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?



Across the world during this ongoing pandemic people of different faiths & of no faith are asking similar questions about the meaning of life. Since lockdown began 15,000 people per month have searched google for information on the Christian faith. Some intellectuals argue that life has no real meaning. Psychologists addressing the huge rise in mental health issues tell folk to bring meaning into their lives by focusing on what they can control & grasping the importance of little things (hearing more clearly the birds & seeing more vividly changing autumnal colours). They advise that mental health is improved by movement (exercise) & having meaningful social relationships (we are created for relationship with – we can ring, zoom, shop for, send notes to – each other, and we can talk with our Creator God).

For 2000 years before Christ philosophers wrestled with these same questions of meaning. Aristotle said meaning comes from looking for good in what we do & to pursue this. Socrates thought the only good was knowledge & the only evil was ignorance. Plato argued that meaning came from desire, emotion & knowledge. Move forward 4000 years, & 2000 years after Christ the same questions are still asked. German philosopher Nietzsche who

who influenced Hitler, believed that God was dead & meaning was to be found in cultural revolution. Nietzsche observing Christians famously commented, “They would have to sing better songs for me to believe in their Redeemer & [they] would have to look more redeemed!” Do WE look redeemed to those around us?

The alpha course addressing life’s big questions observes, “Some dream of fame & fortune, some feel you find ultimate happiness through a good career, money & relationships. But as good as these things are, there is a niggling feeling that there must be more to life”. Comedy actor Jim Carrey agrees, “I wish everyone could get rich and famous and have everything they ever dreamed of, so that they would know that’s not the answer.” Yesterday (8th) Sir David Attenborough said on the BBC, “I believe ordinary people worldwide, are beginning to realize that greed does not actually lead to joy.” From an entirely different perspective, Comedian Russell Brand says “Drugs & alcohol are not my problem. Reality is my problem! Drugs & Alcohol are my solution to fill a hole inside me.” Singer Freddy Mercury asked in a song, “Does anybody know what we are living for?” **People from many different backgrounds all searching for meaning in life.**

Solomon the wisest man ever, writing approx.1000 BC, also addressed the meaning of life. He had the Hebrew title *Qohelet* one translation is *philosopher* The book of Ecclesiastes is part of the Wisdom Literature from ancient (2000 BC) Egypt & Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq). It is the only part of the ‘Pessimism Literature’ to be included in the Bible. Many philosophers had concluded suicide was the only answer to the challenges of life, but whilst Ecclesiastes echoed much of this pessimism, it stood in contrast because **it held the possibility of joy, faith and an**

assurance of God's goodness. In Ecclesiastes Solomon makes a clear division of reality into two realms, the earthly and the heavenly. He also distinguishes between observation (what we see) and faith (what we believe). **This allows him and us to face the fallenness of earthly life in the light of the heavenly hope of our faith.** Our faith is not an airy-fairy, unrealistically optimistic, superficial faith, but rather a much deeper faith which sees the reality of the fallen, struggling world for what it is. Our faith brings meaning to our world. For some secularists life has little meaning, and reflects Solomon’s often repeated negative statements, “**Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless!**” Conversely we as followers of Jesus believe in a Creator God. The vastness of the universe, the wonder of nature and the complexity of living organisms, all testify to the existence of a supreme intelligent designer, in whose image we are made, and who longs for relationship with us. Consequently we have hope. As Solomon’s father, King David wrote in Psalm 19:1 “**The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands**”. Creation itself points towards its Creator!

By the end of Ecclesiastes 12:13 Solomon the philosopher concludes, “**Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind**”. Like Solomon we can say that we are clear that the purpose and meaning of life can only be properly understood in the context of our relationship with God, made possible through our trust in Jesus Christ, who said in John 14:6, “**I am the Way, the Truth and the Life**”. Let us do His will and allow our lives to show to others the fruit of His Spirit in us (“**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness & self-control**”, Galatians 5:22-23) in us. During this current pandemic let’s not waste the opportunity to share with others, life’s purpose & hope, and **the true meaning of life.**



CHRIS McC SAYS

When we went into initial lockdown, it took me 10 weeks to get any order in any day – partly because I was used to being out and about but main reason was spending such a lot of each day trying to get stuff set up online. My biggest concern was not being able to get a priority shopping slot in any of the supermarkets. It eventually occurred to me that it may be because we share an email address which doesn't show my name, so when the supermarkets checked their lists they were looking for Alistair's name. In lockdown small details can make a big difference. Helen stepped in for the next umpteen weeks, doing our weekly shop and other church members offered to get us anything we wanted so we were very grateful and well catered for.

I found it difficult to settle down to do much as I was used to being out and about and just catching up on things in the house in between.

Alistair and I were able to do a little bit of local walking for a short time but all that came to a sudden halt and lasted for many weeks. It was a great relief to get the go-ahead from Leeds St James's (it's 5 years since I had my transplant) that it was okay to go out for walks, suitably distanced, for not only general health but mental wellbeing too. That was a great feeling of freedom for us both. We have found all sorts of local paths plus other places a little

further afield we didn't know even existed but have turned into really good walks. Alistair has particularly benefitted on our daily jaunts out as his joints are improved and he can walk at a reasonable pace now.

I have caught up on some tidying out, some sewing including making masks and we've enjoyed sitting in the garden when the day was cooler having a drink and doing crosswords. I got back to doing some baking and cooking, and then passing some of this on where I could. Alistair looks after the garden these days and has grown some vegetables which we've enjoyed eating and our small apple tree has produced some nice apples. Again, we have been able to pass on some vegetables and apples too where possible.

I have started reading my bible again after a long time of being "too busy". Fortunately, I have a ladies' bible which has daily devotions written by various Christian ladies. These short reading have been helpful as have Phil Jump's weekly services. I have spent more time in prayer but sometimes find it easier to do when I'm doing a mundane job. I have also reflected more on all the things that I do now and have done each day over the years. I have realised that I need to be more discerning about what I take on, putting the Lord first in everything and not jumping into things – but that's a work in progress!

I appreciate Staying Connected each week, containing much information and hearing about what others have been doing, those who are having a birthday coming up, as well as some items for further reading and reflection. The list of dates for meetings with links for easy access and information on prayer requests are very useful, and we both have a laugh at Jonny's weekly humour which drops through our letterbox!

Apart from being a trustee in Intact I have not been working in any particular capacity other than attending zoom meetings. We

started walking with Intact when they resumed their walks, but this has been put hold again. My involvement with the Food Bank is simply to give out vouchers. I know that they are very busy as there is now more need, and they have extra sessions, 4 per week, plus a Saturday one for emergencies. It is a service that people should make use of when needed.

Technology has come into its own as it has been good to see people on our zoom meetings, when we otherwise wouldn't have been able to see them at all, and I look forward to the time when the church family can all meet up again at church. We've both been blessed by having weekly WhatsApp video calls with Neil and David. Neil has had to postpone 3 possible visits from London to Preston because of restrictions and although David is in Preston, he has kept away most of the time too, just to be on the safe side.

At the beginning of lockdown I spent a lot of time keeping in touch with some church family and friends in Edinburgh, by text but I'm not doing that so often now unfortunately. We feel blessed having many friends from the church family as well as Neil and David, and all family members spread around the country. Overall lockdown has been a useful learning curve for me and will stand me in good stead for how I move forward.

Haz says, "Let us all remember to pray for Chris and Alistair, for all the people that they come in contact with around TCF, and in Intact, and in the Food Bank. May they and their family be truly blessed and enjoy God's favour and protection during these unusual COVID days".