

## I. The Test of Life

Life feels a lot like a test. You didn't ask to take it, but there you are. And you can't leave the testing room. The questions are huge and you've got to answer them. These questions probably do not occupy your mind as you go through your day, but you've got to admit they're important. In fact, they haunt us.

These questions are called ultimate questions. Asking and trying to answer them is an important part of what makes us human. Animals don't ever worry about them. Have you ever seen a dog sitting in the doorstep mulling over the purpose of his existence? Or a cat musing about what happens when she dies? Nope. But we do, and we do it a lot.

## II. What Makes the Ultimate Questions “Ultimate”?

The ultimate questions are many, but they can be summarized into four main questions:

- The question of *Origins*: From where did everything come?
- The question of *Meaning*: Why are we here?
- The question of *Morality*: How are we to live?
- The question of *Destiny*: What happens after we die?

Why do we call these questions “ultimate”? First, because all other questions that take life seriously eventually come back to one of these questions: your future, who you marry, your job, even the choices you make today. Second, they affect every person who has ever lived or will live. They are not limited to a group of people at a particular time or a particular place, but they go beyond all limitations and stare deep into the eyes of every person. Third, they are ultimate because the answers affect every molecule of the universe. When we ask the question of origins, for example, we are not merely talking about the origins of the earth, humans, or even St. Louis, but we are asking about the origins of *everything*. These questions *do* have answers. *Something* happened when everything came into existence. *Something* happens when we die. You cannot say, “It doesn't matter what happens when I die,” because it *does* matter what happens when we die. Now, you may not care what happens, but that is another issue. In fact, that is the major issue, because the answers to the ultimate questions matter ultimately. The worst way to live is with our eyes closed and our fingers in our ears pretending these questions do not exist. In reality, these questions have been confronted by humans from as far back as we can see in recorded history.

And the questions just won't go away. Take the 1997 song "The Meaning of Life" by The Offspring from their *Ixnay on the Hombre* where they complain about people shoving their meaning of life down their throats. Their conclusion is "and the bottom line in all of this seems to say there's no right and wrong way." Or take the 2003 song by OutKast called "Church" where they ask the question, "Man, have you ever really wondered like why we are here? What the meanin' to all this?"

Usually we find ourselves confronted with ultimate questions at times of tragedy: the death of a loved one, an accident, a serious illness. Sometimes we look at them when we are confronted with a decision to make about our future or a choice to make about being honest or not. Sometimes when we watch a movie, hear a teacher, or read a book that conflicts with our view of the world, we find ourselves thinking about ultimate questions.

In any case, how we answer these questions is a reflection of our worldview. We will be discussing this more in our next session. Before we do that, let's explore each of these ultimate questions for a moment.

### **III. A Closer Look at the Ultimate Questions**

#### **A. Origins: From Where Did Everything Come?**

Human history is full of ideas about how the universe began and how we got here.

Someone once said to me, "Science tells us everything we need to know about creation." This is a statement that even a good scientist wouldn't make. Science only studies the physical world and evidence that we can see through observation and experimentation. To paraphrase Cambridge physicist Stephen Hawking, science can tell us *how* the universe works, but not *why*. Science can tell us *how* matter exists, but not *why* it exists. Science can tell us *how* gravity works, but not *why* it works or even exists.

This scientific approach to life is the engine of modernism – the idea that anything that has to do with God or religion is merely a matter of opinion or superstition. It doesn't have anything to do with real life.

So we are back to the question, "From where did everything come?"

Some believe the universe just popped into existence. However it is described, it is by purely natural processes that the universe exists. There was no creator or any outside force to cause the universe to exist.

Some say the universe has always existed. They believe there was never a time when there was no universe.

Others take more of an agnostic approach and conclude that we cannot know or that we will never know how the universe came about. If it was important for us to know, then we should be able to find out.

The most widespread belief, of course, is that a Creator brought the universe into existence. This is the belief that an Intelligent Designer with enough power to create the universe also instilled matter with behavioral principles which we call the laws of science. This is the idea behind the unmoved mover of Aristotle; this is the God of the Old and New Testaments.

You may be thinking, “So what? What does it matter what happened so long ago?”

Well, it does matter! If God created everything, we must acknowledge that our very existence is dependent upon Him. That is the starting point for understanding why everything is as it is. As a skeptic once said, “If God does not exist, then nothing matters. If God does exist, that is all that matters.”

## **B. Meaning: Why Are We Here?**

This is a lot different than asking, “Why am I here?” because there you are only looking at your own, specific life. But, whatever *your* purpose is, it must be derived from the *overall* purpose for everything that exists.

Why are we here? Is there a purpose for life? Is life just random, no reason, no purpose or goal?

You may be thinking again, “So what?” But don’t give in so quickly. Whether you like it or not, you are living out your understanding of your meaning every day. Meaning in life gives us direction and helps us determine what is important.

So, what is the purpose of the universe? What is the purpose of human life? What is the purpose of you?

If there is no Creator, then it is unlikely there is any purpose for existence, at least a purpose outside of ourselves. We can always make up something to keep us going. How you see meaning can affect everything you do. Karl Marx, Adolph Hitler, Gandhi, and Osama Bin Laden all had specific purposes in mind for the human race and their role in human history.

If God created us, then the most obvious question to Him is, “Why did you create us?” Don’t you think He would tell us?

### **C. Morality: How Are We To Live?**

What God has told us is closely related to the next question: *how* are we supposed to live? How are we supposed to know what is right and wrong, what is good and bad, and who decides anyway?

It is evident that every person has a sense of right and wrong in their heart; every person has a conscience. Every culture has a moral code that is remarkably similar in its foundation and in the specifics. In other words, there is a sense of right and wrong that permeates humans all over the world. Why?

From where did this moral code come? There is no doubt this code keeps us from destroying ourselves.

Many explanations for where this came from ignore God as their source. Many believe our moral code is something we decide on ourselves and it is passed on in society and families. But this doesn't seem to answer all the questions.

Your moral nature is another indication that we are human. This makes us think there is something more to life than what we can see, feel, and touch.

### **D. Destiny: What Happens After We Die?**

What happens after you die? This is an easy question to ignore. As Woody Allen says, "I'm not afraid of dying; I just don't want to be there when it happens."

Some people believe that when you're dead, you're gone, you cease to exist. If this is true, then there is no accountability for our lives; there are no consequences; there is no heaven or hell; there is no anything.

Others believe we continue to exist after death. Our spirits leave our bodies and sometimes may be incarnated in another body as another person (or an animal or other living thing). It depends upon the amount of karma we have accumulated as to where we go next. Some believe it is to a higher plane. Some believe we lose our individuality and go back into the great sea of existence.

Of course, those who believe in a Creator God usually believe we continue to exist after death. Our life here determines what happens to us after we die. In fact, the writer of Hebrews states, "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment ...".

It is easy to see how belief concerning destiny really does make an impact on how we live today. If I believe I am not accountable for my actions, I live differently than if I know there are consequences.

#### **IV. Summary**

As you have already been thinking, the ultimate questions are intimately connected to each other. What you believe about origins has an impact on what you believe about destiny. For example, if you believe God created everything, then you believe that when you die you are responsible to Him. In fact, this belief also gives you insight on how you live and what you consider your meaning and purpose to be.

The ultimate questions. Even not to answer them is to answer them. You have no choice. You are accountable.

This is deep stuff. This is the stuff of life, the stuff of worldviews.