

The Big Picture

Part II: Sensibly Seeing Our Meaning

April 23, 2023

Today we're picking up our pursuit of the actual answers that make life make sense. And since searching the big picture is such a big *task*, we're giving ourselves four whole weeks to sort out our **origin, meaning, morality, and destiny**. And *this* morning, **we're aiming to answer the meaning of life**; so let's see what we got by answering *this*: **What's the point?** What got you out of bed and *led* you to want to *do* what you're doing *today*?

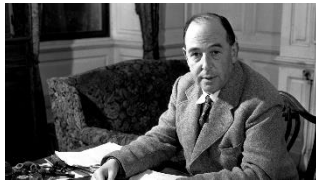


Well, last week we looked at our *origin* story as I shared some of the stuff that blew my mind and broke my heart in searching for a working worldview. And in the end, I told you why I gave in to giving God His shot as the supernatural supplement to all my scientific answers. And that's when things started falling into place. But *not* just because the Bible told me so – because **it proved itself by providing a meaning of life that made sense of what I was seeing**. It was *consistent* and *coherent*; and it rationally fit my experience and intuition *if* I was willing to accept a supernatural origin as a child of *God*. But even as a cocky twenty-something who thought he was a pretty big deal, 'God Jr' felt a bit... *much*. So I'd like to take a minute, just sit right there – I'll tell how I came to believe it makes sense I'm God's heir. And **it all starts with meaning**.

What does meaning mean? That's the key to one of our core questions in building a worldview. It's the '*why*' behind life that we're wired to want answered. It's the end *and its means* and everything in between. And as hard as it is to scan and solve *Where's Waldo*, **finding meaning in life is like reading an impossible book called Why's Waldo?** How do you even know when you're finished? Well, welcome to the nightmare of existential philosophy! Luckily, a lot of the legwork has been done! For starters, we've got a good grip on *what* we're looking for – to find meaning. And I like how Tim Keller puts it, **meaning is where purpose and significance overlap**. That is, for something to be meaningful, it has to *intentionally* have an *impact*. Otherwise, it's *random* or *pointless*, and we call it *meaningless*. So what's *life's* significant purpose? It's a huge question with a deceptively simple answer. In fact, it's as easy to understand as the number 42, once we get the question nailed down, so *Don't Panic*.

And though I spent a lot of time in the secular, 'science-says' camp hunting for a good *origin* story – not so much with *meaning*! Cuz life's *purpose and significance* was always admittedly the weakest part of their worldview since the logical answer is a little... *uninspiring*. Ready? **There is none**.

As Stephen Hawking says, **"The human race is just a chemical scum on a moderate-sized planet."**



Because without anything outside of *nature*, that's what you *have* to believe; nobody put us here for any purpose and since this place is gonna expire, nothing we *do* objectively matters at all. Like historian Carl Becker said in a famous Yale lecture: from a strictly scientific viewpoint human beings *must* be seen as **“little more than a chance deposit on the surface of the earth, carelessly thrown up between two ice ages by the same forces that rust iron and ripen corn.”**

So – how do all our ‘science-says’ atheists handle a life that’s ultimately *without* purpose or significance? *This* answer is even better: **Try not to think about it!** Sure they dress it up by changing contexts and limiting logic, but if a life *without* a factual purpose or actual significance *bothers* you, their general advice is *clear*, **To the degree you can remain ignorant you can retain bliss.** Okay, fair enough... I just don’t know if I can undo the instinct to *think* long enough to enjoy anything! Cuz it’s surprisingly difficult to stay numb or dumb all day – and I know because I bartended for ten years! And I’ve personally tried it!

And no matter how hard I worked to accept *this* weakness in a worldview, I couldn’t shake the sensation that there was an actual truth always lurking nearby just baiting me into *thinking things through*. Because like C.S. Lewis said, if I decided to just try to have a good time and *ignore* that feeling, it would be hard to be in love with my wife when deep down I knew, and *kept remembering*, that everything about her that I found profoundly beautiful was really just a **“momentary and accidental pattern produced by the collision of atoms”** and my feelings were just a **“sort of psychic phosphorescence arising from the behavior of your genes.”**

Well, there goes *love*. And *art*, and *music*, and – well everything that brought me joy back when I *thought* it might mean *something*. **So what was my alternative?** What were the Christians offering as the meaning of life that would make sense of *my* story and *their* claim that I had a *supernatural* origin story? And please, tell me it’s better than **“Fuhgeddaboutit!”** Well, it was. **The Prodigal Son.** A simple story that hit close to home. And then changed the way I *saw* home, *forever*.

You know the story, but to *review*: it’s about an impatient rich kid who demands his inheritance, leaves the family, blows the money and ends up *so broke* that he’s jealous of the *pigs* he’s hired to feed. And after he gets a taste of the stuff he *thought* he wanted, he’s haunted by the memory of how good he now *knows* he had it back *home*. So, he ditches doing things his way and heads home hoping his dad will let him move back in as a *servant* instead of a *son*. But before he even makes it home – his *dad* comes to *him*, hears his *humbled* heart, and welcomes him home with a party **“For this son of mine was dead and is alive again.”** – Luke 15:24 NIV

Sound familiar? It did to *me*, cuz *that’s* how I lived down *here*; but when I realized it was an *echo* of the same story we *all* share, I suddenly saw the big picture: **We’re here because we wanted what God wouldn’t offer.** Because He *knew* better and we *didn’t*. And we’d never have a happy harmony at home unless we *all* really *wanted* to be there. So **He let us leave to learn what we want.**

That's the supernatural story threaded through the Bible that not *only* explains *where* we came from, but *why* we're *here*. So in case it's been lost in *your* translation, I'd like to summarize it with a few words from the Author that gave purpose and significance to all the good and bad *I* ever had; and *more* meaning every minute I'm still here: So. *A long time ago in a paradise far, far away...*



God the *Father* said, **“Let’s make humans in Our image.”** And just like all kids, it didn’t take long for God’s offspring to start challenging Dad because they wanted to be like *Him*, not *‘just a kid’*. So one day, after someone *else* gave them some misinformation, they decided to go *against* Dad’s command, thinking they might know better. And a brokenhearted Dad saw the kids had, become like *Him*, learning about good and *evil*. **But unlike Dad, they did evil**, because even though they knew the *difference*, they weren’t sold on which one to want. And Dad knew they couldn’t stay at home while they were this way because **what made Paradise perfect was how everything worked together for good**. And differing desires create conflicts that can’t exist in a perfect place. Even when they come from His kids. So, **they needed to move out and get right!** So, Dad sent them down here to taste whatever they wanted and make up their own mind on what was bad or good. However, because He loved them too much to leave them alone, He packed a note in their bags to jog their memories of life back home. Because He knew, the way they would grow to know that *they* wanted *Dad’s* good, was being *let down* by down *here*. And, so, He watched and waited as His kids did just what Dad knew they’d *do*: **they learned they didn’t want anything apart from what Dad had and they yearned to go back home.**

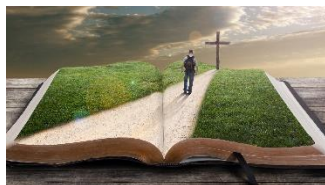
So, they re-read the note and *started* to see exactly why Dad did what He did. They understood **that their double-minded mix-up of good and bad is what tore them apart individually** – and likewise, going against good back home is what ruined the relationships in perfection. They knew they needed to get on the same page as Dad by being humble enough to admit they were wrong. And right when they reached the end of themselves and were willing to go tell Dad they now wanted what *He* did, **Dad came down to them as Jesus, to hear their heart and walk them home.** And that meant making sure the lesson was learned by giving the living example of the true good that needs to be agreed upon for perfect unity up in the perfect community. And **the living example was love.** Because love keeps the focus on fulfilling the interests of others in an act of harmony instead of conflict. So Dad held their hand and led them all the way back Home as Jesus, by showing them the simple attitude adjustment that gets everything to fall in line with all Dad’s recipe for perfection: **Love Dad and love the other kids!** Cuz once we *all* learn that Father knows *best*, we’ll all *want* what *He* wants, and follow *His* lead, laid out in Jesus, so we can live it up in the place of perfection – perpetually held *together* by each member’s *choice* to love the whole body above *themselves*.

And as a Christian, **we're told we're those kids!** And if *true*, picking up the *moral* of *that* story, means discovering the *meaning* of *your* life! Your *purpose* is to **learn to choose to love what's good!** Just like Jesus! And that's *significant* because **it's how we have to be for harmony in Heaven!** And *that fit* the feelings from all *my* experiences down *here* as well as that *instinct* about up *there!* It makes *sense* that selfless love is required to keep the peace in a perfect place where life is lived forever and ever without any *worry* of somebody disturbing the peace. And we *all do* obey our own *beliefs* more than the boundaries of *others*; so it makes *sense* that to get us ready to rejoin perfection, we *had* to build our *own* beliefs that agree with *His* uncompromising good!

Look, **you may have lost sight of home but home never lost sight of you.** I went 'full prodigal' because I wanted to see what the world had to offer. But here's the lesson I had to learn in hindsight: even running *away* from God to get after what *I* wanted – was playing right into *His* hands because **whether we're hating evil or loving good, we are fulfilling His plan!**

Because wherever *you're* headed, **this place is designed to get us all to stop and think!** And that's the poison pill for a weak worldview! But it's the glue that holds a good one together. So when Christianity has the audacity to egg us on by demanding we *ask, seek, and knock* – we'd be foolish not to plug and play so we can honestly say whether or not it makes sense of our story!

And sure, we all feel a little lost, wondering *why* we're down here – but don't deny we all also feel a little love, reminding us where we *belong*. And **if we can accept that struggle as part of our purpose, we can start to see behind the scenes** and discover that the very love we need to *learn* is what gave *us* this place to sort things *out* and bring us *back*. This world is where we can make those mistakes that lead us to want what's good – without the completely destroying everything.



And the critical reminder in the supernatural note that He wrote into our natural story, is that there's a simple reason you're here and an easy way to go home. **You're the reason you're here** and **He's the way to go home.** And if God is who He says He is, the force behind both of those truths, is the same one behind everything He ever does; *love*.

He claims as the picture of perfection, He loves us so much that **rather than lose us, He joined us and walked the most painful path back home, so we'd never have to do it alone.** He showed us the redeeming and perfecting effect love has on the suffering we cause ourselves – by taking on the same suffering without ever earning it. And He did it joyfully just so that we could clearly see **the meaning in life was to understand and completely, personally BELIEVE:**

Love never fails. – 1 Corinthians 13:8 NIV

Cuz if we're both the *object* and *instrument* of the supernatural love behind perfection, Nat King Cole was right to say, **"The greatest thing you'll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return."**

Now, the question becomes how do we *do* that love down *here* in the way that gets us back up there? Well, that's the next big *answer* in the big *picture* – and we're gonna hunt it down next *week*, when we tackle *morality!*

1. God said, "Let Us make mankind in Our image, in Our likeness – Genesis 1:26 NIV
2. And God said, "The man has now become like one of Us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." – Genesis 3:22 NIV
3. For we *are* God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to *do*. - Ephesians 2:10 NIV
4. Do *not* conform to the pattern of *this* world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will. – Romans 12:2 NIV
5. Physical training is of *some* value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the *present* life *and* the life to come. – 1 Timothy 4:8 NIV
6. For while we *are* in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because ... [we wish] to be clothed instead with our *heavenly* dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now the One who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, *guaranteeing* what is to come. Therefore we are *always* confident and *know* that as long as we are at home in the *body* we are away from the *Lord*. – 2 Corinthians 5:4-6 NIV
7. Those who live according to the *flesh* have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have *their* minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. – Romans 8:5-7 NIV
8. What causes fights ... among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?– James 4:1 NIV
9. Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded ... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up. – James 4:8-10 NI
10. He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment — to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. – Ephesians 1:9-10 NIV
11. If you have any *encouragement* from being united with Christ, if any *comfort* from His love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any *tenderness* and *compassion*, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in Spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of *selfish* ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value *others* above yourselves, not looking to your *own* interests but each of you to the interests of the *others*. – Philippians 2:1-4 NIV
12. Over all [selfless] virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. – Colossians 3:14-15 NIV
13. 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. – Matthew 22:37-40 NIV
14. Here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. – Ecclesiastes 12:13 NIV
15. So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. – 1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV
16. For *God* so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. – John 3:16 NIV