

Called to Ministry?

Nones & Dones Series Slide

Welcome to the third message in our Nones & Dones Series- that will continue at various times for the remainder of this year...you can grab some inviter cards, scan that QR code and get the schedule for it. Please do note- that two have these dates in the summer have moved.

What we're aiming to do is take a fresh look at Christianity and the claims of the Bible, with the intent that it may be helpful to some of you who don't consider yourself religious at all or find yourself in some secular understanding of life and the universe. Others of you have left the church- and Christianity behind because you were hurt by Christians or your life changed in such a way that practicing a religion that kind of seemed pointless didn't really fit your life anymore.

For whatever reason you find yourself here today, I'm glad you're here.

Moment of Silence

In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was a tyrant king who killed people to show off his power- so the Greek gods force him to roll a boulder up hill, only for it to roll back down every time he reached the top.

Little known fact- in the original Sisyphus myth— Sisyphus is moving into his house and he has to move a couch up and down 3 flights of stairs in August- and every time he puts the couch down in a room, his wife says "I don't like here, lets move it back downstairs". And that keeps happening for eternity.

But the gods thought that was excessively cruel- so they went with the boulder thing.

Now- anytime a task seems pointless, tedious, or laborious- we describe it as Sisyphean. Lots of work- accomplishing nothing.

In 1942, philosopher Albert Camus wrote an essay entitled "The Myth of Sisyphus".

In it, he argues that every human being wants their life to mean something...but the universe is "unreasonably silent" about the meaning of life. He calls this "the absurdity of life". Life feels like it should mean something...but it doesn't.

Its like Sisyphus- a lot of work- but completely pointless.

Camus' remedy for this problem is this.

"The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy."- Albert Camus

In other words, just living life without meaning is enough to satisfy you. Instead of thinking about the bigger picture- just imagine how fulfilling pushing a rock up a hill is.

Tom Nagel- an atheist philosopher- says that if you have this expectation in your life that there ought to be meaning, then you're gonna experience the absurdity of life. But if you stop insisting that your life has some grand meaning- then you're free to make that meaning up for yourself.

Harvard scientist Stephen Jay Gould agrees.

"We may yearn for a 'higher' answer — but none exists. This explanation, though superficially troubling, if not terrifying, is ultimately liberating and exhilarating. We cannot read the meaning of life passively in the facts of nature. We must construct these answers ourselves.... There is no other way."- Stephen Jay Gould

So, the basic idea here is that there is no larger meaning in life. If we are all here by cosmic accident- then you can't simply extract meaning from outside...it has to be created... on the inside.

Then- there is the belief that meaning isn't created by coming from inside of you, rather the meaning of life is part of a bigger story. It comes from outside of you. There is an objective meaning that each of us are responsible to live up to.

Viktor Frankl was an Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor who wrote a book called "Man's Search for Meaning" after his time in a concentration camp.

He noticed that the people who survived, who didn't give into the despair of the camp- kept their mind on a meaning outside of themselves. They had people they were living for, relationships they wanted to be reunited to.

Here's what he says.

"Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how'"

"Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible."- Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

In other words- don't look inside yourself for meaning- look outside of you. Meaning is a response to an outer call to which you will be held responsible. In other words, you have a calling- a purpose- and a duty to fulfill that calling.

And he says- those who discover that meaning outside of them- that can answer the "WHY" of life- can bear any sort of "HOW" of life- even in the middle of a concentration camp.

Title Slide: "Sisyphus Wasn't Happy: Why Meaning is Better Discovered than Created" Genesis 1, Ecclesiastes 1, Colossians 3

According to the Bible- God - the creator of life- gives our lives an objective meaning. We don't create our own meanings- instead- we all have a greater calling as humans- which include individual callings on our lives. But God is the one who creates and defines meaning.

Life, in fact, though full of suffering and difficulty- is not meaningless. In fact- the Scripture tells us that even suffering- for those who know God through Jesus Christ- even suffering will be used reductively to bring about the purposes of God.

Today- I'd like to first show you from the Scriptures about the meaning of life- by starting on the first page of the Bible- then jumping to a skeptic that wrote a book of the Bible- then onto the New Testament- eventually- at the end, we'll end up in a gospel. Like we did last week, I'll read a passage- we'll talk through it, then we're going to see what idea actually fits reality better- creating meaning on the on the inside- or discovering it on the outside.

Genesis 1:26-28

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth."

27 So God created man in his own image;

he created him in the image of God;

he created them male and female.

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it."

No doubt here that meaning is coming from outside. There is a God who creates humanity to be like him. Humanity is not just another piece of his creation- rather is specifically made to be higher than the rest of creation. Humans are to benevolently rule- or as its put in the next chapter- Cultivate and Guard creation.

Genesis 1 has a couple of major differences from other pagan creation myths of its time.

1- The others were all conflict between separate gods. In other words- there was order that erupted into chaos and dissension. In the biblical story- there is one God who is a community in himself that looks at chaos- and brings it into order. Creation comes FROM harmony and peace...and creation is made for harmony and peace- every created thing working together.

2- Humans in all the other creation myths were slaves of the gods. Here they are co-workers- vice regents- image bearers. Meaning- they were created for a side by side, face to face cooperating relationship.

Which is evident in “Be fruitful and Multiply-“ which in its most physical sense requires FACE to FACE encounter between a man who is dependent on a woman and a woman who is dependent on a man to bring about children. They

And there is the face to face encounter with God- because in the effort to raise up children and send them out into the world to cultivate it- every parent will tell you- thats going to bring dependent prayers even out of an atheist. “OH LORD JESUS!”

COOPERATIVE CULTIVATION

So the basic takeaways here-God creates humanity with a purpose from outside- to cultivate creation. To take the raw materials of his creation and make something good with them that is good for everybody. And that project is to be very relational- COOPERATIVE- with God and with each other.

Ok fast forward to

Ecclesiastes 1:1-3 The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem.

2 “Absolute futility,” says the Teacher.

“Absolute futility. Everything is futile.”

3 What does a person gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?

- I know this says these are the words of the Son of David- which literally would mean Solomon. Likely- however- this is not actually Solomon- but more like

someone writing pretending to have all the resources and power of Solomon. This is a philosophical experiment- wherein the writer of this book is going to talk about amassing great wealth- and pleasure- and possessions- and experiences. Only something that could be achieved by a King. So its kind of like this “teacher” is saying “Imagine what one could do if you were King- Now- I’m going to show you- its not as great as you think it is. In fact- the greatest kings die- just like you or i do. Really- they aren’t that special.”

- In fact- the word here “Teacher” is the strange and seldom used title of “Qoheleth”.
- Its probably mostly understood as “leader of the assembly”- that’s why is often translated as “preacher” or “teacher”.
- By the way, the book is called “Ecclesiastes” because its the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word “Qoheleth”. Ecclesiastes means “gatherer”.
- So essentially, what you have in the word “Qoheleth” is a gatherer of people. Someone who gathers people together to listen to something.
- Maybe even better understood as philosopher.
- All this guy does is raise a ton of questions- without providing many answers. That’s why he’s like a Philosopher. He’s very Socratic. He gets you to think. Some have suggested that Ecclesiastes should be the first book of the Bible- because it asks a bunch of questions that the rest of the Bible goes about answering.
- So- Ecclesiastes is not exactly a book to find answers- but it can point you to some of the right questions.
- In v 2
 - The Hebrew word that is translated as Absolute Futility is the word “Hevel”
 - It literally means- Breath or Breeze or Vapor.

v 3

- Now look at the Philosopher’s opening question.
- What does a person gain from this life? The Answer: Nothing. How can you gain anything from a faint trail of smoke.
- And here we come up on another phrase very important to the Qoheleth.
- “Under the Sun”

- This phrase will show up over and over in this book. By it, the Qoheleth is talking about what life is like in the broken state of creation. Because God's creation is broken by sin- futility reigns. You can do the same things over and over and over- humanity keeps going through the same cycles- and nothing is getting any better.
 - One scholar translated it "Flatulence"- which actually is quite entertaining to go through and read Ecclesiastes inserting that everywhere you see "vanity" or "futility".
 - Life is like blowing out a candle- there is smoke there- but its transient. Its passing away. And you can't really grasp it.

What you'll find in these first chapters of Ecclesiastes is a lot of Sisyphean cycles. The philosopher here is posing the question- Does life have any meaning from outside if all we do is the same thing over and over until we die?

Eccl 1: 8-9

- Humans never think "That's it. I'm full. I have seen it all, said it all, heard it all." We never go "Golden Axe is the greatest achievement in video game history. STOP MAKING VIDEO GAMES- THERE IS NO NEED."
- No- we always long to have something new- to break the constant repetitive cycle, something to say or see or hear that will be truly new and therefore significant- but there is nothing.
- Not in broken creation. There is nothing new under the sun.
- The Qoheleth is calling us to stop pretending like we won't keep going through this cycle until we're all dead and all our stuff will end up in a garage sale.
- Lets stop pretending that the new job, or having the kids, the marriage or landing on the moon- will finally be the thing that makes our lives "impactful" and meaningful.
- It won't work.

Eccl 1:12-14

12 I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 I applied my mind to examine and explore through wisdom all that is done under heaven. God has given people this miserable task to keep them occupied. 14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun and have found everything to be futile, a pursuit of the wind.

He says- "I've done the experiment. Everything UNDER THE SUN is futile. No novelty exists. Everybody just gets old and dies. Nothing matters. Its all Flatulence.

The key here is the phrase “Under the sun”.

The Teacher here is intentionally cutting off God from this. Can we operate in the world where we disconnect from someone outside this world giving us meaning. Can I MAKE all these pursuits mean something if I CREATE the meaning- or am I dependent on a God OUTSIDE of me to give life meaning?

His answer. Well the closest we come is this. He takes us back to Genesis- to the reality of a creator that is BEYOND the sun.

Eccl 12:1 & 13-14

So remember your Creator in the days of your youth:

**Before the days of adversity come,
and the years approach when you will say,
“I have no delight in them”;**

13 When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is this: fear God and keep his commands, because this is for all humanity. 14 For God will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil.

In other words- while you are young- drill into your mind- that God is real- that he is at work, and is very present with you, or else you’ll get cynical and bitter as time goes on.

And he summarizes the whole thing by saying, “Respect, honor, trust that God. He created humanity- he knows why we are here. And when life seems absurd- don’t forget- he is going to make everything right. There is a future newness- something we haven’t seen since Genesis 1- a return to the shalom, the peace, the harmony of the Garden. All things will be made right.”

Now to the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossian church.

Colossians 3:1-17

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Notice what he says here- THINK!

He points the church to think about the gospel. That Jesus has died for our sin, resurrected and is now reigning. Set your mind on that. And set your mind on the fact the Jesus has restored you to your original purpose. Instead of pursuing a life for

yourself- you are hidden in him. Reigning over creation with him. Go back to Genesis 1- Its time to cultivate COoperating with him and others. And know that everything you do has purpose- because he is coming back to make all things new. So now reconsider your life in him. Working with him to do things that matter for eternity.

So then he reasons with them.

5 Therefore, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, God's wrath is coming upon the disobedient, 7 and you once walked in these things when you were living in them. 8 But now, put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator. 11 In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.

Listen to the focus on newness (exactly what the Qo leth was saying was missing from life)

Listen to the focus on cooperation and unity. ALL in Christ. No more division no matter where you come from.

And in all that- if you'll think about who Jesus is and what he's done- you will understand how reasonable it is to put away the stuff that brings death and instead commit yourself to the stuff that brings life- that cultivates.

12 Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. 14 Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful.

Remember that's what the Qo leth said. Remember your creator- who brought peace into chaos- not the other way round. BE THANKFUL.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Then he finishes with deep statement of thinking and purpose.

He says let the word about Christ Jesus- let it live among you. Through teaching and community- through singing and the repetition of gathering together to not lose focus that God has called us to a life that means something.. a life of cooperative cultivation with God and others!

So that's the picture of meaning, and the philosophical experiment in the Scripture to test the meaning if we exclude God. Nothing means anything if we don't get out of ourselves and go beyond the Sun.

SO those are 2 ways of looking at it.

The secular- there is no god- or if there is you can't no him- so there is no meaning unless you make it up for your self. "Imagine Sisyphus happy"

Or the Scripture

There is a personal God who created us to know him and know others in love forever- and everything we do now counts for eternity. So lets do life giving cultivation together- instead of death bringing consuming as competing individuals.

Now- lets compare those.

And what I'd like to say is that the Xian understanding of meaning is more Rational, Relational, Resilient

1) Discovered Christian meaning is more Rational than secular created meaning.

The idea behind created meaning is that even in the absurdity of life- that it is better for us as humans to live for something- and since that something isn't real outside of us- we need to make it up.

So the question that comes up next is "Why?" Why is important for us to have "better lives".

So we can be healthy emotionally, physically, etc.

Why- so we can work?

Why?- so we can make money and provide for our families.

Why? So we can create jobs and give to charity to alleviate poverty

You see the problem. If you keep thinking if you keep asking WHY- eventually you end where the answers get more and more difficult to find or justify.

Eventually no one and nothing is going to matter- because the world will blow up in a solar flare.

Even if you manage to write a book that is remembered for centuries- eventually all of humanity will be extinguished and none of it mattered- it won't matter that you exist.

So what do you then have to do?

Well- the suggestion from many secular humanists, philosophers, and atheists is "Don't think so much about the big picture."

Imagine Sisyphus happy.

Suppress the truth. (maybe you remember that last week from Romans chapter 1.

Don't ask the big questions. Isn't that completely irrational.

Christianity on the other hand- you heard Paul say "THINK!"

Set your mind on who Jesus is and what he has done.

If a secular person feels meaningless- the answer is stop thinking.
If a Xian feels meaningless- its THINK MORE!

Meaning is outside of you. You don't create it. Return again to Genesis 1, Ecclesiastes 12- REMEMBER your creator. Put your mind on God setting things right and on the fact that your life is hidden in Christ- attached to his glorious destiny. Don't get caught up in the futility of life think it through- EVERYTHING MATTERS.

LOVE LASTS FOREVER! NEWNESS IS COMING!

2) Discovered Christian meaning is more Relational than secular created meaning.

If we are all creating our own meaning- think how that divides us.

Imagine a basketball or football team where the coach says- "Everybody pick the position you want to play"

Well- everybody is gonna pick QB or Receiver- and you won't have a Longsnapper or punter.

It takes a coach to recognize the individual gifting and use it for a cooperative purpose.

If we are all making up our meaning and values. We often fail to think how it affects others. We are just looking for others to celebrate our meaning when we share it with them. No one's created meaning is supposed to be "wrong" since there is no bigger story or gameplay to fit into.

So we have no say together as to what our direction as a society should be.

If we say "you are free- you just can't use freedom to harm others. Well, what does it mean to harm someone? Who gets to define that if we are all deciding our own meaning. If one person says, I would like to starve the poor...or eliminate an entire race of people- if we have no common given purpose- how can we together say that's wrong?

Without discovered meaning we can't ever really say "Stop doing that!"

And then- if you say "The meaning of life is to define for your self what meaning is" That is completely non-sensical and self-defeating. Because the meaning of life is defined in that statement."

What we end up with is a brand of capitalist consumerism. Things that used to be communally held- like raising children, or worshipping together...are now private choices that can be measured, priced and consumed according to your tastes and convenience.

And you know who is going to drive those particular arbitrary tastes and conveniences?- Advertisers. People who can mold your desires to get money from you.

You aren't as free as you think when you choose your meaning.

On the other hand-

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

4 Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different ministries, but the same Lord. 6 And there are different activities, but the same God works all of them in each person. 7 A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good

He goes on to talk about the church as a body that works together to accomplish something. Namely- to make God's love known to the world. Where everyone is individually gifted by God- to work together to make something beautiful.

Happiness and fulfillment isn't found by chasing individual happiness- but by living into the part of the body that God has called you to be- and using that gift to serve God and others.

If you aim for individual happiness you'll never hit it. Because you were created and called to Cooperative Cultivation.

But if you live into that Discovered meaning- deep joy comes along with it.

3) Discovered Christian meaning is more Resilient than secular created meaning.

If you have to locate your meaning in the material world, under the sun, it means that whatever you decide that you mean will be threatened by suffering or death.

So if you decide to live for family, or a political cause, or for some career achievement- it can all be thrown off course and disrupted by suffering.

This is why so many people are forced to reconsider meaning when suffering hits. I've mentioned several times David Brooks' book "the Second Mountain" which is story after story about this.

People are pursuing a particular meaning or goal they have set for themselves- then cancer hits, or the car wreck, or the stock market crashes...or they actually achieve their goal and feel completely empty.

And so in that discomfort and suffering- they have to start a 2nd mountain. Which usually has to do with following a discovered purpose- a calling and responsibility or duty from outside themselves.

If meaning is arbitrary- it is ultimately a trick. A lie to yourself to keep you distracted. But when suffering hits- Sisyphus gets honest- instead of happy. He realizes that he's just pushing a rock up a hill- and he'll never accomplish anything that matters.

But Christianity says something totally different.

2 Corinthians 4:14-18

15 Indeed, everything is for your benefit so that, as grace extends through more and more people, it may cause thanksgiving to increase to the glory of God.

16 Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. 17 For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory.

18 So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

John 1:1-5, 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

14 The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. -- John 1:14 (CSB)

Logos- greeks search for the meaning of life.

Now the Logos is a person. The meaning of life is a person.

You can hug the truth.

And he loved us so much that he died in our place. For the lies we tell ourselves. The godlike way we define meaning for ourselves is an act of rebellion that tries to get the Kingdom of God without acknowledging the KING of that kingdom of peace.

So Jesus died for our transgression of his kingdom, and then resurrected and invited us- fully forgiven restore human beings- to take his hand and once again cultivate cooperatively with him and each other.

And then watch what happens at the end. What we are looking forward to.

Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

2 I also saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.

3 Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away.

The OLD has passed- and its nothing but ONGOING newness. Whats old? The broken, the pain, of our sin and death.

Suffering cannot take this from us. Death is now only a doorway into this. The meaning of life resurrected and invites us to follow him into this kingdom.

But its not just one for later- Remember- even now as our outer selves are wasting away toward death- our innersoles are being renewed. Not because we looked inside and said- Tell me insides- what should my life mean.

No- the beginning of the transformation your inner self that will one day be completely manifested in a whole, complete resurrected body living in a whole complete NEW resurrected physical world- the only way to start that is to look up to the LOGOS- dying on a cross for your sin- forgiving you- and calling you upward from the outside.

Will you say yes to that call? Give up your “freedom to define yourself” that only results in irrational, separated, and corruptible slavery...and let the creator of your life define you forever.

LORDS SUPPER