

The Biggest Questions in Life – Part 7: What is the Purpose of our Existence?

At some point in our lives, we all ask the same question: What is the purpose of our existence?

On an episode of the hit television show, 'Everybody Loves Raymond', Raymond's daughter asks him such a question: Why are we here? Raymond is flustered, but after a few moments of panic, invents a creative answer. Heaven is overpopulated, he explains, and to ease the "Heavenly congestion" God sends us down to Earth for a time.

Although the answer was humorous, I believe that few people can provide a better explanation.

There are two main perspectives to this question. The division is based on whether or not one believes in a guiding force in the universe. Most humans understand this force to be God.

For Christians and Jews, the Bible provides us with some guidance. In the book of Micah we are told to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Christians are instructed to make disciples of all nations in Matthew 28. In Psalm 97, we are told to hate evil – a directive that conflicts with the prevailing belief that all hate is wrong.

These are just a few Biblical commands. Yet, how many believers live this type of life? Do we seek justice in our lives and communities? Do we have mercy, and demonstrate compassion for people?

Many people prefer to boast about their abilities and accomplishments, than to walk humbly with God. In addition, I notice an increasing inability for people to identify true evil. Today, the guy who fails to recycle cans, cuts us off in traffic, supports the wrong political party, or refuses to wear a pink breast cancer awareness ribbon is considered to be immoral.

For those who believe in a purely natural origin to our existence, we are creations of a godless evolution. We might be just another cog in the wheel of life – no different than any other animal in the food chain. It is true that we exist as individuals; however, our individual existence holds no inherent importance.

Nonetheless, belief in a higher power only allows us to determine where we might derive our purpose. It does not reveal the purpose itself.

Atheists and agnostics acknowledge that we can play a positive role in the lives of others. We may not be a special creation with a personal relationship with a deity, however, that does not make our lives insignificant.

People acquire meaning in all sorts of things. Some fulfill their purpose by being actively involved in politics, the environment, civil rights, animal rights, volunteering, fundraising, or community projects. We find purpose and meaning in our work, raising children, caring for elderly parents, and our relationships.

These actions satisfy our desire to accomplish something, and contribute to the nation, community, or family.

Outside of our personal lives, we also seek purpose in those around us. We naturally project our lives onto others, since few of us can attain the success we desire. We root for actors and movies to win awards, sports teams to win championships, and politicians to win elections – as if those successes somehow reflect on us. Such projections are actually inconsequential, yet, it is our way of giving significance to life.

Whether or not our lives are God-centric, the purpose of our existence appears to be what we desire most. It is our aspirations that give our lives meaning. Consequently, whether it is directed from God or emanates from within, our purpose in life is our passion. Without that passion, life would be pointless.

Add in some wisdom, and a benevolent objective, and we just might have a meaningful life worth living. And, perhaps, a better society in which to live.

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