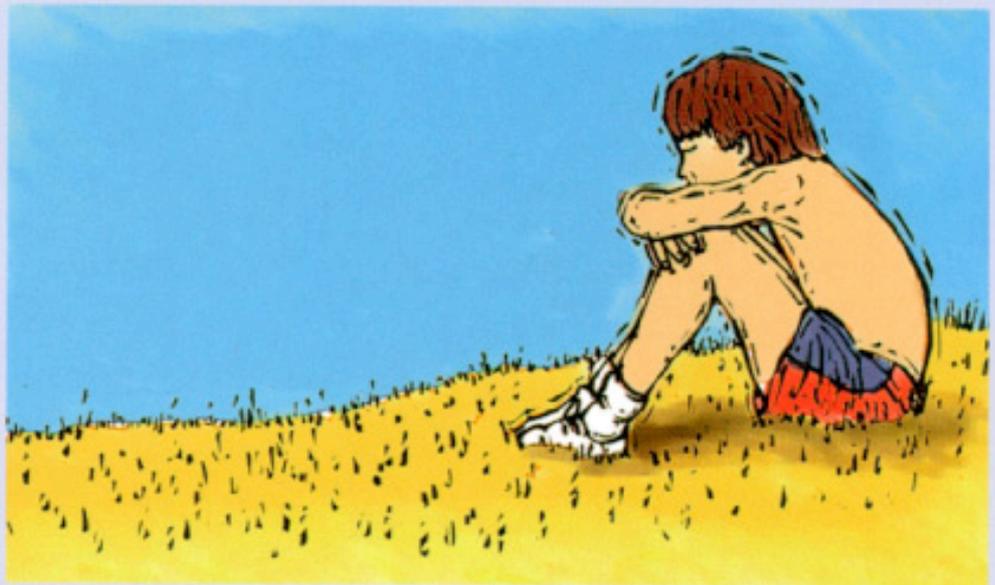


# Purpose



How Can I find  
a Great Purpose  
for Living?

Dick Tripp

# How Can I Find a Great Purpose for Living?

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## Foreword

In writing this booklet, Dick Tripp has highlighted the inability of our western culture to give the present and the future generations little if any sense that life has any overall meaning or purpose. In the last decade, our South Sea's paradise has gained the reputation of having one of the highest teenage suicide rates in the world. We lead the world in teaching hopelessness to our young people. Dick shows the meaning of life is not found in the pursuit of wealth, career, and our personal happiness.

When I was 30 years old my wife Miriam and I had a family of three lovely children. We had just built a new home in a nice suburb in Dunedin.

At the time I was a Detective in the Police, and a few years previously I had represented Otago and NZ Services at Rugby. I was about to retire from the game and life was boring. It was at this reflective time I converted to Christianity out of a nagging sense that there must be more to life than just living and playing sport.

I left the Police five years later, accepting a call to pastor the Baptist Church at Oxford. During our early years in the pastoral ministry we discovered that with some people their faith and personal lives crumbled in the storms and pressures of life. They wrongly concluded in the face of these setbacks that God had failed them and they had not achieved the success they thought He owed them. Some of them actually believed that faith in God almost guaranteed complete personal happiness and the fulfilment of their desires. In this book Dick Tripp has identified this western worldview as one of the major causes of immaturity and failure of personal faith in the church today.

Following the sudden death of our daughter Caroline we came to realise that the difference between getting bitter or better lay not in our personal strength to stand and overcome the tragedy. It lay rather in just simply trusting in Jesus, in the knowledge that we were on this earth for His purpose and pleasure. Whatever came our way, if we only laid hold of this just, loving, and merciful God, He would give us the strength and comfort to make the right choices. During that terrible time of pain and grief, Miriam and I will never forget, despite our loss, the almost overwhelming sense of His presence and love.

In this book Dick Tripp has discussed heroes of the faith, people who performed deeds that, in comparison with our own, can leave us feeling quite inadequate as Christians. Without detracting from the sacrifice of these saints, I feel they all discovered a key, which the Apostle Paul wrote of in Philippians 1:21, "**to live is Christ and to die is gain**", that was the foundation of their lives. When hardship, difficulty, persecution, rejection and injustice came their way, their reactions and decisions were based on the belief that they lived for Christ no matter what, and He would always be there for them. That key opened the door to God's unlimited resources of love and strength, demonstrating in them that He is more than able to bring us through all that life may confront us with.

This way is open to all of us. Dick Tripp's booklet could be the key to opening the door for the first day of your life.

**Pastor Maurice Atkinson** Maurice and his wife Miriam have pastored Oxford Baptist Church for 19 years and speak throughout NZ.

## Introduction

A generation ago, Max Webber, the eminent sociologist, wrote in his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*:

*With the progress of science and technology, man has stopped believing in magic powers, in spirits and demons; he has lost his sense of prophecy and, above all, his sense of the sacred. Reality has become dreary, flat and utilitarian, leaving a great void in the souls of men, which they seek to fill by furious activity and through various devices and substitutes.*

Theologian Paul Tillich believed the characteristic experience of his day to be one of disruption and meaninglessness.

More recently, C. Longley, in the foreword to Jonathan Sachs' *Faith in the Future*, says:

*Western civilisation suffers from a strong sense of moral and spiritual exhaustion. Having constructed a society of unprecedented sophistication, convenience and prosperity, nobody can remember what it was supposed to be for.*

Whatever else the events of the twentieth century may have achieved for the human race, one of the effects has been to leave multitudes of people with little sense that life has any overall meaning or purpose. Victor Frankl, the eminent psychiatrist who became Professor of Psychiatry and Neurology in the University of Vienna, spent three years in the Auschwitz concentration camp. In his book *Man's Search for Meaning* he describes his experiences and his observation that those inmates most likely to survive were those "who knew that there was a task waiting for them to fulfil." They had a purpose for living. He concluded that, in addition to Freud's 'will to pleasure' and Adler's 'will to power', human beings have a 'will to meaning'. He developed what he called 'logotherapy' to help people find some meaning in life. Commenting on Victor Frankl's work, Arthur Koestler wrote:

*It is an inherent tendency in man to reach out for **meanings** to fulfil and for **values** to actualize...Thousands and thousands of young students are exposed to an indoctrination ... which denies the existence of values. The result is a worldwide phenomenon — more and more patients are crowding our clinics with the complaints of an inner emptiness, the sense of a total and ultimate meaninglessness of life.*

Meaningless leads to boredom, alcoholism, juvenile delinquency and suicide. According to Emile Durkheim, in his classic study of suicide, the greatest number of suicides are caused by *anomie*, which could be rendered 'normlessness' or 'meaninglessness'. And 'anomic' suicide takes place when

somebody either has no goal in life or pursues a goal they can't reach, whether power, success or prestige.

A young Australian, Tim Corney, writing in *Zadok Perspectives* about the hopelessness of Generation X, "the children of the most divorced, most mobile parents this century", writes:

*As I walk the streets of my city, the spray-can voices shout out in polychrome unison the disillusionment, boredom and helplessness of a street culture that has stopped trying to make sense of the world."*

These are just a few of the many examples we could give. But if they accurately describe the sense of meaninglessness that many find in today's world, where can we look for some answers? What is life meant to be all about? Where can a true and satisfying meaning to life be found? How can we find a great purpose for living? The purpose of this booklet is to provide some answers to these questions.

## **Life with no meaning**

Of course, if you deny that there is any creative intelligence behind this universe, that created it for some meaningful purpose, you may decide that life cannot have any meaning anyway, except for that we choose to give it in our own little world. Many settle for this option. A leading modern painter, Francis Bacon, said:

*Life itself is a tragic thing. We watch ourselves from the cradle, performing into decay. Man now realises that he is an accident, a completely futile thing, that he has to play out the game without reason...Man can now only attempt to beguile himself for a time by prolonging his life—by buying a kind of immortality through the doctors...The artist must really deepen the game to be any good at all, so that he can make life a bit more exciting.*

Colin Wilson, author of the best seller *The Outsider*, which was an acute inquiry into the sickness of mankind in the mid twentieth century, summarised the thoughts of many leading existential thinkers like this: "Man is a useless passion. It is meaningless that we live and it is meaningless that we die." Douglas Adams wrote four science fiction novels, the first being *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. They tell the story of four time travellers who hitchhike across the universe from the Big Bang to its destruction. They build a giant computer designed to answer "The Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe and Everything." The answers it comes up with are meaningless.

Ultimately, if you rule out any intelligent and creative mind behind this amazing universe, you are left with no alternative. Peter Kreeft, in his very thoughtful book *Making Sense Out of Suffering*, sums up the two options we face very well. He writes:

*Make this issue simple and concrete. Look at anything. I'm looking now at a late spring snowstorm. A surprise, a gift. Is there a giver? Is it part of anybody's plan? Is it - ultimately, finally, in the long run - really meaningfully, a part of the plot of our life's story, part of a gift or task or a work? Is anybody there? Is the whole world, including every snowstorm and every star and every headache and every bug and every death and every cancer - is it all between God the storyteller and ourselves, so that this material universe is only the stage setting of the story? Or is the universe a meaningless darkness in which we desperately erect little artificial theatres, light them up with little artificial lights (our reasons), and put on little artificial plays (our lives), whose sole meanings are assigned by their sole authors (ourselves)? The really ultimate question, much more important than the scientific question, is: Who's there? That's why myth is more important than science. Myth is an answer, though an unsatisfactory one, to the deeper question, Who's there? Science only answers the question, How does it work? Or at the most, What's there? Science asks what and how, philosophy asks why, myth and religion ask who. Who's in charge here? Who's the author? That's what we really long to know.*

## **Purposes that are too small**

Others are not so ready to deny the existence of God altogether, but rather ignore him and choose for themselves goals in life that don't take him into account. These goals may be trivial, selfish, or seemingly good, but often they are goals *that don't go anywhere*. Some time ago the Associated Press carried an interesting, if somewhat depressing story of a British peer who had died a few days short of his 89th birthday. As a person of means he had presumably not had to work for a living, so he had 70 adult years to pursue any work of his choice—anything he felt worthy of his abilities. According to the story he had devoted his whole life to one great purpose—trying to breed the perfect spotted mouse!

Ray Hoo, a graduate from Iowa State University, tells how, on return to his home in Jamaica, he was interviewed for a job by the head of the Jamaican banana industry. The interview seemed to be going well until, in answer to the question "What do you do in your spare time?" Hoo explained that he spent a lot of time in Christian activities because someday he hoped to give his life to Christian missions. Immediately the tone of the interview changed. He was told, "Young man, your ambitions are noble; but we want men who will give their lives to bananas."

There are plenty of things we can live for. Some live to make money. Some live to enjoy themselves. Some live to make a name for themselves. Others choose goals that are more noble. Sometimes the problem is that we

don't look far enough ahead. Supposing we do reach our goals—what then? It would be tragic to reach the top of the ladder, only to find that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall. In most cases our goals are too small. C. S. Lewis, in a celebrated essay, *The Weight of Glory*, summed up this well:

*Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.*

In this booklet it is not my intention to argue for the existence of a God who can give purpose and meaning to life. If you are still stuck on this question, may I suggest you try some of the other booklets in this series, perhaps starting with *Is Jesus Really God?* or *What is Truth and Does It Matter?* I will be assuming that such a God is there and that we can know him, as Christians have always claimed. My intention, rather, is to spell out what this purpose is that he can give to life, with some final thoughts about how you can find it. My primary source in the New Testament. If you want to find a book that is full of *meaning* you can't do better than read this. It is a book that not only describes this universe of both matter and humans as they really are, it also tells how we can find that destiny for which we were planned. This is a destiny that can provide the greatest satisfaction on our journey through this life, and also gives a hope that reaches into a future beyond our greatest dreams. This is the kind of purpose that can give meaning to all the little goals we set for ourselves (and make some of them appear trivial!).

## **A purpose that fits with reality**

One thing is certain. If this God is really there and is indeed a God of such goodness and love as the Bible describes, and if he created you and me for a purpose, then we will find the greatest satisfaction in life if we find out what that purpose is and make it our own. I am not likely to find true satisfaction and joy in life if I continually rebel against that purpose for which I was created. So a necessary starting point to finding this purpose is to accept the reality of this living God and of all that he intended for me as a created human being. If Christianity is true at these points, then to look for a true purpose for living anywhere else will be to continually knock my head against the proverbial brick wall. Ultimately, I can only be a loser.

So let's take a moment to look at God's ultimate purpose for human beings. The Bible declares that humans were created with God-like qualities ("**in the likeness of God**"—Genesis 5:1) that distinguished them from the rest of creation. This implies a number of things. We were given intelligence, a moral conscience, a certain autonomy—the freedom to make choices. Above all, however, we were given a spiritual side to our nature which enables us to enjoy a relationship with the God who planned our existence. Sadly we abused this relationship, a story, with its consequences, that is spelled out vividly in the opening chapters of the Bible.

The Bible uses a number of different terms and metaphors to describe the results of our choosing to live independently of God. We are "**dead**" in our "**transgressions and sins**" (Ephesians 2:1). That is, we are spiritually insensitive to the reality of God, cut off from the source of true life. Though created to live in loving relationships with God and others, we have become centred on ourselves "**ruled by the selfish desires of our bodies and minds**" (Ephesians 2:3). Though created with a great purpose and destiny, we have become "**lost**" (Luke 19:10), groping around in spiritual darkness (Ephesians 4:8). Though created with great mental abilities, our ability to think clearly and see the truth has become distorted by our prejudices and self-centredness. "**Their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts darkened**" (Romans 1:21).

However, that is not the end of the story. The whole Bible is the glorious story of what God has done to bring humans back into a loving relationship with himself. It focuses on the coming of Jesus, the Old Testament looking forward to his coming and the New Testament describing it. In his great love he took the full consequences of our sins and rebellion by bearing those sins himself on the cross. "**Christ died once for our sins. An innocent person died for those who are guilty. Christ did this to bring you to God**" (1 Peter 3:18). Having overcome the twin enemies of sin and death<sup>1</sup> he now reigns as the Living Lord, offering forgiveness and reconciliation to all who will put their trust in him. When we come in repentance and faith to Jesus, accept him as our Saviour and submit our lives to him as our Lord, then we can begin to fulfil that true destiny for which we were created. Jesus comes in the person of the Holy Spirit to live within us<sup>2</sup> and we begin a new life of partnership with him.

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<sup>1</sup> For the evidence for, and the implications of, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, see the booklet in this series *Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?*

<sup>2</sup> I have described the nature of God as a Trinity of Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—how this makes sense and how we can experience the reality of this triune God in our lives, in the two booklets *Understanding the Trinity* and *God's Vision for His Family, the Church*.

One result of this new beginning will be that my goals in life will begin to change. More and more, as I begin to experience his love and become aware of all that he has achieved for me in paying for my sins, and all that he has planned for me in the future, I will desire to love him in return. My desire will be to please him and fulfil his purposes for me rather than to live for my own selfish ends. Instead of being focused on myself, I will become more and more focused on God, using whatever gifts he may have given me in service to him and to others. Paul puts it up like this: **“We are ruled by Christ’s love for us...He died so we would no longer live for ourselves, but for the one who died and was raised to life for us”** (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15). John Calvin, in his catechism, summed it up as follows: **“The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”**

Having received forgiveness, and being loved with an infinite love by the greatest lover in the universe, I now find it easier to accept the reality of who I am as a flawed but forgiven human being. I no longer need cringe at the thought of having to deal with the reality of God. I can enjoy his companionship and delight in his greatness and love **“because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us”** (Romans 5:5). I no longer need avoid the reality of the evil and suffering I see in the world around me. The Bible story gives me adequate reason for the presence of such things, the presence of God gives strength to cope with them and the promises of God give hope of the final victory of good and the time when **“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away”** (Revelation 21:4). Neither do I have to avoid the reality of judgement. The Bible speaks clearly and often of the certainty that God will one day judge humankind, and do so justly. But I am assured that **“there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 8:1). Living for Jesus is a purpose that fits the reality of things as they are.

## **A purpose that satisfies the deepest longings of the heart**

Robert Louis Stevenson once declared that **“an aim in life is the only fortune worth finding.”** To not only have an aim in life, but to have found that purpose for which one was ultimately created, gives a deep and lasting sense of peace and direction to life. David could confidently declare, **“The Lord will fulfil his purpose for me”** (Psalm 57:2; 138:8). This is not fatalism. It requires active cooperation on my part and the surrender of my will to that purpose.<sup>1</sup> It may not be an easy road, but the knowledge that God is working

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<sup>1</sup> I have explored the question of how we may find the will of God for our lives in the booklet *How Does God Guide?*

out his purpose in my life and that this purpose is going to have great lasting value, not only for myself, but for others whose lives God can touch through mine, far surpasses the fleeting pleasures that this life alone can offer.

There is great sadness in the picture of Lord Byron sitting in a little Italian town, writing in his diary, "I go to bed with a heaviness of heart at having lived so long to so little purpose." Unfortunately that is the story of too many. Jesus offers something far better and much more satisfying. David Brainerd, who exercised a very fruitful ministry to North American Indians in the mid 18th century, said, as he lay dying at the age of 29, "I declare that for all the world I would not have lived my life otherwise." He also declared, "There is nothing in the world worth living for but doing good and finishing God's work, doing the work that Christ did. I see nothing else in the world that can yield any satisfaction besides living to God, pleasing Him, and doing His whole will." In an interview, Dr. James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, was asked what he wanted written on his tombstone. He replied:

*When I reach the end of my days, a moment or two from now, I must look backward on something more meaningful than the pursuit of houses and lands and machines and stock and bonds. Nor is fame of any lasting benefit. I will consider my earthly existence to have been wasted unless I can recall a loving family, a consistent investment in the lives of people and an earnest attempt to serve the God who made me. Nothing else makes much sense.*

### **A purpose that will enable us to face life's greatest difficulties.**

Jesus never indicated to his followers that they would find a life committed to him free of problems. Rather the opposite. At his last meal with his disciples before his crucifixion he said to them: **"They will put you out of the synagogue; I fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God...In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"** (John 16:2, 33).

However, to have a great purpose in life and to know where you are going, can make all the difference when it comes to taking life's knockbacks. The German philosopher Nietzsche, though an unbeliever, said "If a man has a *why* for his life he can bear with almost any *how*."

The New Testament has a good deal to say about suffering and what God can achieve in our lives through it when we are committed to serving him. He can use it for developing character and maturity (Romans 5:3; James 1:2-4), deepening our faith (1 Peter 1:6, 7), creating bonds with others who suffer and so enhancing our ministry to them (2 Corinthians 1:3-7), and

increasing our dependence on God and our experience of his grace and strength (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). One thing is certain. For one who is committed to Christ and seeking his purpose for their life, suffering is never without *meaning*. As Victor Frankl put it, “Despair is suffering without meaning”. God’s purpose is to make us *worthy* of his kingdom (2 Thessalonians 1:5) and he sometimes uses suffering to achieve it. I may not understand what God is doing but *he* knows, and a committed believer can trust him for that.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, when the fundamental goal of one’s life is to live for the glory of God, then bitterness, a sense of unfairness, despair and other negative emotions that often accompany suffering are easier to cope with. The focus is elsewhere and not on the suffering itself. It was such a goal in life that enabled 16-year-old Caroline Atkinson, daughter of New Zealand Baptist pastor Maurice Atkinson and his wife Miriam, to face the prospect of suffering and early death. Though she did not experience her wish for healing in this life, her victorious spirit shines through the last entry she wrote in her diary on May 15th, 1992, the day before she died during an operation for her brain tumour.

*Well, according to medical science I am never going to grow old. I have a year in the least to live. I have brain surgery tomorrow to remove as much of a malignant tumour as possible, but God has promised me he is in charge and he is the one who can heal me. I believe it may be gone when the go to remove it, Amen! Or perhaps his purpose is different and I have to go through more to continue his plans. I have a purpose. I am not going to die. God is in control.*

*I would love to catch sight of the Glory of God only to return to lead my friends to the Lord. Oh! If only, please God let me.*

*Lead my paths and help me to live and honour you in everything I do and bring glory to your name. Please help me have the peace I now do in you to pull me through. For that I may honour you and bring others to get to know you. Let that be my purpose. Yes please, O God, take my life.*

*You are the potter, I am the clay. Mould me. Make me. This is what I pray.*

**YOU ALONE ARE MIGHTY AND POWERFUL.**

Thirdly, the certainty they have of a glorious future when there will be no more suffering, enables one who is committed to Christ’s purpose for his

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<sup>1</sup> I look at this issue in some detail in the booklet *If There Is a God, Why Is There So Much Suffering?*

or her life to see suffering and trials proper perspective.<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoffer, later to be executed by the Nazis for his resistance to Hitler, wrote in his prison diary, "In view of our supreme purpose, the present difficulties and disappointments seem trivial". Paul, who endured stoning, eight floggings, three shipwrecks, imprisonments, ill health, hunger and thirst, and goodness knows what else, in his letter to the church at Rome put it like this: "**I am sure that what we are suffering now cannot compare with the glory that will be shown us**" (Romans 8:18). To the Corinthians he wrote: "**These little trouble are getting us ready for an eternal glory that will make our troubles seem like nothing**" (2 Corinthians 4:17). A. W. Tozer, author of several very helpful books on the Christian life, summed it up well:

*The man who comes to a right belief about God is relieved of 10,000 temporal problems, for he sees at once that these have to do with matters which, at the most, cannot concern him for very long*

Fourthly, because it is through the infinite sufferings of Christ that the believer has entered into newness of life and the experience of that great love, they may even choose to *embrace* suffering when it be for his sake, and count it a privilege to do so. One of my favourite stories is of Robert Stewart, shortly to go China with the China Inland Mission, at the Keswick Convention at Derwent Water in 1893. Another who was present for the convention was Temple Gairdner, himself to become a missionary to Egypt. Gairdner's biographer describes the scene as some from the convention were taking a break from the meetings to go boating on the lake:

*[Suddenly] a tall, rather majestic figure, standing bareheaded at the prow of one of the boats, uttered an unforgettable call. His hands outstretched, his face with a shining in it that Gairdner never forgot, he cried to that company of happy youth, "Agonia is the measure of success. Christ suffered in agony, so must we. Christ died. So perhaps may we. Our life must be hard, cruel, wearisome, unknown. So was His."*

Robert Stewart, with his wife and child, were among the 79 missionaries and their children of the China Inland Mission who were killed a few years later during the Boxer Rebellion in that country.

The intrepid missionary, David Livingstone, who opened up central Africa for the gospel, made a similar choice. During one terrible journey of 7 months, from November 1853 to June 1854, he had thirty-one attacks of intermittent fever, incredible hardships, constant wading through swollen streams, tedious delays and harassing exactions from hostile tribes. He wrote :

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<sup>1</sup> I examine the grounds for this certainty in the booklet *Can I Know for Sure I Am Going to Heaven?*

*It is true that I suffered severely from fever, but my experience cannot be taken as a fair criterion in the matter. Compelled to sleep on the damp ground month after month, exposed to drenching showers and getting the lower extremities wetted two or three times every day, living on manioc roots and meal and exposed during many hours each day to the direct rays of the sun with the thermometer standing above ninety degrees in the shade—these constitute a more pitiful hygiene than any succeeding missionaries will have to endure.*

*If you knew the satisfaction of performing a duty as well as the gratitude to God which the missionary must always feel in being chosen for so noble and sacred a calling, you would have no hesitation in embracing it. For my own part I have never ceased to rejoice that God has appointed me to such an office. People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay.*

Paul put it like this in writing to the Christians in Philippi: **“For to you has been given the privilege not only of trusting Him but also of suffering for Him** (Philippians 1:29—The Living Bible translation). Some things are worth suffering for. S. D. Gordon, author of several very helpful books on the Christian life in the nineteenth century, wrote:

*Let it once be fixed that a man’s ambition is to fit into God’s plan for him and he has a north star ever in sight to guide him steadily over any sea, however shoreless it seems. He has a compass that points true in the thickest fog and fiercest storm and regardless of magnetic rock.*

### **A purpose with lasting consequences**

It has been said that life is all signposts and no destination. However, Jesus offers, not only a destination, but a destination that will endure when all that false values and dreams of this world have crumbled to dust.

Someone has written:

*Live for your athletic achievements—and some day the elastic in your legs will go, your reflexes will slow down, and your life will be “over”.*

*Live for your scholastic attainments—and some day knowledge will pass you by, and life will be over.*

*Live for your family alone—sometime the children will be grown and gone, and life will be over.*

*Live for your business success—some day age will come, younger men will reach impatiently for your place, and life will be over.*

*But live for Christ—live for the inheritance that fades not away—and life will then have just begun!*

God planned this universe with the ultimate intention of creating humans with whom he could enjoy a loving relationship. He did not go to all that trouble just to put us here for a brief span of time and then cast us into oblivion. He is a more wonderful God than that! When people put their trust in Christ as Saviour and Lord of their lives they become “citizens of eternity” as the great Russian novelist, Dostoyevsky put it. **“And they will reign for ever and ever** (Revelation 22:5).

Jesus constantly challenged people to live for the things that will last forever. In his famous Sermon on the Mount he said, **“Don’t store up treasures on earth! Moths and rust can destroy them, and thieves can break in and steal them. Instead, store up your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy them, and thieves cannot break in and steal them. Your heart will always be where your treasure is** (Matthew 6:19, 20).

For those who are committed to live for Christ:

- Our Father is in heaven (Matthew 6:9)
- Our Saviour is in heaven (Hebrews 9:24)
- Our home is in heaven (John 14:2-4)
- Our name is in heaven (Luke 10:20)
- Our life is in heaven (Colossians 3:1-3)
- Our heart is in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21)
- Our inheritance is in heaven (I Peter 1:3-5)
- Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20)

So a Christian is one who has long term goals, the rewards which will last forever.

This means that none of the good I do here will be wasted. After writing a long chapter on the resurrection, both of Christ and the believer, Paul wrote: **“Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain”** (1 Corinthians 15:58). It is the person who is focused on eternity who is the true realist and who will be the winner in the end. **“Things that are seen don’t last forever, but the things that are not seen are eternal. That’s why we keep our minds on the things that cannot be seen”** (2 Corinthians 4:18).

This does not mean that the Christian who has such long term goals is unconcerned about the needs around him or her in this life. David Neff, writing in *Christianity Today*, put it well:

*Precisely because Christian hope is fixed on God’s future, believers are freed from the security-loving ties that would bind us to the present order. Like Wilberforce who risked reputation and fortune to fight the slave trade, like*

*Father Damian who gave his life to care for lepers, like Jim Elliot who forfeited his life to bring a violent people the gospel of peace, we are not to be tied to success, security, wealth, or power.*

*Rather, we are to be open to taking risks for God, to being pioneering agents of godly change. Knowing that God has secured our future we can work for the world's salvation and well-being, relieving suffering, discrimination, ignorance, and injustice wherever it is found.*

The perceptive writer, C. S. Lewis, said in *Christian Behaviour*:

*Hope is one of the theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not, as some modern people think, a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither.*

### **A purpose that involves a choice**

Becoming a Christian involves a choice between two very contrasting ways of life. However such lives may work out in daily living, the motivation for each could not be more different. Two examples present this contrast very clearly.

The first is that of the respected Dag Hammarskjold, the first Secretary General of the United Nations. During his earlier years, despite a successful career as a Swedish government official, he has struggled to find meaning in life. Sometime in 1952 he wrote in his journal, which he titled *Markings*:

*I demand what is unreasonable: that life should have meaning. I struggle for what is impossible: that my life shall acquire meaning. I dare not believe, I do not see how I shall ever be able to believe: that I am not alone.*

Hammarskjold found what he was looking for in Jesus Christ. He said yes to God. From that hour he said, "I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, thereafter, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal."

The second example is that of Mark Hatfield, recently retired from a very much respected career in the United States Senate, and at one time considered for the position of Vice-President. In a brief paragraph he describes the decision he made when sitting in his parents home in 1954, thinking about the purpose of his life. He says:

*I could not continue to drift along, going to church because I had always gone. I saw that for 31 years I had lived of self, and I decided I wanted to live the rest of my life for Jesus Christ.*

Whatever position I may be coming from, whether from a life of drifting, a life of searching for answers, a life centred on living for selfish ends, or a life of respectability, yet without reference to the God who planned it all, the question that faces me is, "Do I really want Jesus as the Lord of my life?" If he is indeed the creator of the universe and the one who took human nature in order to bare the guilt of my sins, then am I prepared to surrender my life to him in gratitude. If so, he will not only offer me forgiveness and his continual presence in my life through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He will also provide meaning and direction, and work in me to mould me into the kind of person he can use to fulfil his purposes in this world. A. J. Gordon said:

*If you would make the greatest success of your life, try to discover what God is doing in your time and FLING yourselves into the accomplishment of His plans and purposes.*

When you fit in to God's plans for your life it not only provides the greatest satisfaction, but also touches the lives of others, perhaps in ways of which you have never dreamed and for which they will be eternally grateful. And it gives a sense of direction which nothing else can do. Wilfred Grenfell, the beloved doctor who gave forty years of his life to serving people in the harsh environment of Labrador, often spoke of the night when he took his stand for Christ during the Moody evangelistic campaign in London in 1885. After rising to his feet to indicate his commitment at a meeting lead by the English cricketers, J. E. and C. T. Studd he later wrote, "I...went out feeling that I had crossed the Rubicon." He would say:

*I was converted from a life of drifting to a life of direction. I found my compass that night.*

## **Conclusion**

Someone has composed the following ditty:

A cheerful old bear at the zoo  
 Could always find something to do.  
 When it bored him, you know,  
 To walk to and fro,  
 He reversed it and walked fro and to.

If your life does not seem to have much more meaning than that and you are still looking for something that is *worth* living for, then may I commend to you the Lord Jesus Christ as the one who gives meaning to living and

purpose to dying. He created you, he loves you, he died for you and he longs to take up residence in your life and fill it with meaning. It can be exciting to have a great purpose in life and to know that it is the purpose for which you were born into this world. The

French philosopher and mathematician, Pascal once said:

*Apart from Jesus Christ we know not what our life is, nor our death, nor God, nor ourselves.*

If you want to find this purpose, may I suggest that you get alone somewhere with God and sort it out with him. You may find it helpful to pray a prayer something like this:

*God, I want to find that purpose for which you created me. I accept that you know who I am, what my gifts are, how my life can count for something meaningful and lasting.*

*I accept that Jesus died on the cross for my sins because of his great love for me. I thank him for that.*

*I am sorry for my sin, I repent of it, and I now accept your forgiveness.*

*Come into my life and begin the process of moulding me into all you planned that I should be and directing me in the path you have chosen for me.*

*Give me the courage and strength to live worthily of your love and to follow this purpose wherever it leads.*

*Amen.*

If you should make this kind of commitment, then start reading through a good modern translation of the New Testament. It is there we learn the things that God desires for us and find the resources to grow and face the challenges that life brings. Also, look around for others with whom you can share the journey. We grow in our faith and develop our gifts best in company with others who also desire to live for Christ.

On a warm Los Angeles morning, in the summer of 1916, a young man took solace under the refreshing shade of a eucalyptus tree. He had been in search of truth for some time. That day, July 29, Charles E. Fuller, committed his life to Jesus Christ. He remained in prayer under that tree all afternoon and later wrote, "Now my whole life's aims and ambitions have changed." The decision he made that day would change the eternal destiny of his life and the lives of thousands since who were touched by his life and ministry.

Jesus told the story of a man who stumbled across treasure hidden in a field. Recognising its value he went off and sold everything he had to buy

that field (Matthew 13:44). Such is the value of all that Jesus offers, in this life and the next. I can guarantee one thing. If you do surrender your life to Christ and choose to live for him, whatever else life may bring, you won't be bored!

