

# The Four Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask

by Eric Lyons, M.Min.

## The Four Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask

*Article In Brief...* 

**In a world of so much unbelief, confusion, and insecurity, the God-revealed, soul-stirring answers to the four most important questions of life desperately need to be studied and shared with others. Thoughtful meditation on these truths can cut decisively through the fog of doubt and refocus our lives around what really matters—the true meaning of life.**

Whereas our “adversary the devil,” the father of lies, seeks to keep humanity in a cloud of darkness and doubt,<sup>1</sup> our omnibenevolent “God is not the author of confusion but of peace,”<sup>2</sup> comfort,<sup>3</sup> and illumination.<sup>4</sup> “[T]he Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning...brought us forth by the word of truth” (James 1:17-18). God’s unchanging, rock-solid Truth, brings enlightenment and stability to a dark and chaotic world.

Even after seeing the light and obeying the Truth, we as Christians sometimes lose our spiritual bearings and find ourselves among the rocks and thorns (Luke 8:13-14). We can feel like we are drowning in a quagmire of doubt and despair, with blurred vision and hearts that are questioning all sorts of things which God settled long ago. Rather than living the Christian life to its fullest, we can get stuck in neutral (or reverse), “grasping for the wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

Thankfully, frequent contemplation of the most fundamental spiritual truths of life can bring clarity amidst confusion, peace amongst apprehension, and courage in the face of fear. In a world full of sin, doubt, and chaos, walking daily with God’s answers to the four most important questions of life provides lucidity, focus, and a real, soul-anchoring hope.

These questions are so fundamental and so important that, if I had only one opportunity to speak to the world about anything, or if there was only one article that I could ever write, this is what I would say.

### QUESTION #1—WHY AM I HERE?

Do you know why you are here? This question is not about what you are doing at this very moment, or what you hope to do next month or next year. Rather, behind it all, underneath everything, at your very core, what is your “Why?” Why do you exist? What is your purpose in life?

Some contend that humanity has no real purpose. One of the world’s most celebrated atheistic, evolutionary writers of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, Richard Dawkins, has argued: “The Universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom...**no purpose**...nothing but pitiless indifference.”<sup>5</sup> Graham Lawton, Executive Editor of *New Scientist* magazine, penned a one-page article in 2016 titled, “What is the Meaning of Life?” What answer did this leading atheistic evolutionist give? Here was his heavy-hitting first

line: "The harsh answer is 'it has none.'"<sup>6</sup> "Your life may **feel** like a big deal to you," he wrote, "but it's actually a random blip of matter and energy in an uncaring and impersonal universe."<sup>7</sup> Since we supposedly "will **never** get **objective** data on the matter," we are unable "to capture a 'true' or 'higher' meaning" to life.<sup>8</sup>

Logically speaking, if there is no God and this natural realm is all there is, then Lawton and Dawkins are exactly right: there is no true, higher, objective purpose in life. We might "feel like" there is, but if we are just "dust in the wind" (as the band Kansas sang in the 1970s), then our lives **really are** as meaningless as "a random blip of matter."

Yet, despite the innate vacuousness of naturalism, most people still seek to find purpose and meaning on an experiential level (though still purely subjective). If our lives do not naturally have meaning, then we'll just keep searching for it anyway, or we'll make it up as we go along. And so, we tend to look for purpose in pleasures, in power, in education, in employment, in riches, in rest, in conservation, or in trying to escape death. Yet still, a real, life-anchoring meaning, which brings hope, joy, and endurance even in the darkest of times, escapes us—just as it did one of the wisest and wealthiest men ever to live.

In the book of Ecclesiastes (one of the more unusual books of the Bible), King Solomon<sup>9</sup> exclaimed:

- "I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge" (1:16; cf. 1 Kings 3:9-13).
- "I made my works great.... [M]y heart rejoiced in all my labor" (2:4,10).
- "I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings.... I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me" (2:8,7).
- "I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem" (2:9).
- "I said in my heart, 'Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure.... I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine...and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.... Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them, I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure" (2:1,3,10).

If anyone could say, "I've tried it all," it was Solomon.

- Abundant knowledge and wisdom?
- Extensive labor?
- Great riches?
- Unparalleled power and prestige?
- Extravagant fleshly pleasures, including 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3)?

Yet, even though he "had everything" and "experienced it all," Solomon repeatedly stressed the meaninglessness of life "under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). From a purely naturalistic, earthly perspective, "all is vanity and grasping for the wind" (1:14).

- "[I]n much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow" (1:18).
- "[T]here is no end to all his labors.... [H]is work [is] burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest" (4:8; 2:23). Solomon wrote: "I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind. Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool?" (2:17-19).
- "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance with increase. This also is vanity" (5:10).
- A man may be so powerful that it could be said, "there was no end of all the people over whom he was made king." But even then, "those who come afterward will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind" (4:16).
- The cold, hard truth is: all **naturalistic** pursuits for ultimate meaning and satisfaction are futile. On both a logical and experiential level, the material realm is incapable of providing "objective data on the matter."<sup>10</sup> So, where do we find the answer to the meaning of life? Why am I here?

## QUESTION #2—WHERE DID I COME FROM?

The answer to the first question is imbedded firmly and deeply within the answers to the next three, beginning with coming to understand where we came from. The reason atheists incorrectly conclude that life has no meaning is that they think that we came from nothing, from nowhere. If, as popular American atheist Dan Barker admitted, "Something came from **nothing**,"<sup>11</sup> and, if, as the late, renowned cosmologist Stephen Hawking concluded, "**Nothing** caused the Big Bang,"<sup>12</sup> then we have no logical reason to be here. There would be no ultimate meaning to life. We simply would be the result of a mindless, cosmic accident, which is impotent to provide a real purpose for our existence.

However, atheism is fatally flawed because matter demands a Maker; life on Earth demands a life Giver; complex, functional design in the Universe demands a Designer; and the supernatural attributes of the Bible demand a

Supernatural Author.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the evidence indicates that God exists and the Bible is His Word.<sup>14</sup> In Ecclesiastes 12:1, the wise man gave the perfect starting point to finding real meaning to our lives: “Remember now your Creator.” Truly we can only begin to learn of our real purpose in life by reflecting on exactly where we came from.

We are not the result of a cosmic accident, nor are we the descendants of bacteria or baboon-like creatures. On the contrary, as Solomon concluded: we were specially made by the Divine Creator. Similar to God Himself, Who “is Spirit” (John 4:23-24), He made us as spiritual beings, but ones that inhabit physical bodies (Ecclesiastes 12:7). He made one man and one woman on the sixth day of Creation, saying, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.... So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).<sup>15</sup> Not only did God specially make Adam and Eve, but He has uniquely made every spirit of every person since then. Thousands of years after Creation, Paul said to an audience of unbelievers in Athens, “We are the offspring of God” (Acts 17:28-29). He did not say that man **had** been a divine image-bearer in the past; he said, “we **are** (*esmen*)”<sup>16</sup> also his offspring” (17:28).<sup>17</sup>

James wrote: “But the tongue can no man tame; it is a restless evil, it is full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we the Lord and Father; and therewith curse we men, **who are made after the likeness of God**: out of the same mouth cometh forth blessing and cursing. My brethren these things ought not so to be” (3:8-9, ASV).<sup>18</sup> The thrust of the expression, “who are made after the likeness of God,” is that humans in the past have been made according to the likeness of God, and **they are still bearers of that likeness**. All human beings are divine image-bearers. All of us are sons and daughters of God by Creation. In a sense, all of us have royalty in our blood. Contrary to what some leading atheists contend (and we say this confidently, yet humbly), “We **are** a big deal!” because we come from a Big God!

Whether or not we come to know and acknowledge that we ultimately originated from the hand of God makes all of the difference in the world. Apart from Him, we are nothing and have no real meaning to our lives. But, “**in Him** we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Only upon coming to this fact-based and fascinating conclusion can we successfully answer the most important questions of life, including our previous question, “Why am I here?” as well as our next question, “Where am I going?”

### QUESTION #3—WHERE AM I GOING?

If there is no God and this supposed accidental, material realm is all there is, then we’re not going anywhere when our short lives are over. In a 1994 debate at Stanford University on Darwinism, atheistic professor William Provine summarized his views on modern evolutionary biology and its “loud and clear” implications. According to Dr. Provine, “There are no gods, no purposes, and no goal-directed forces of any kind. There is no life after death. When I die, I am absolutely certain that I am going to be dead. That’s the end of me. There is...no ultimate meaning in life.”<sup>19</sup> But Dr. Provine is wrong: there is ultimate purpose, because the evidence indicates that an eternal, spiritual Creator exists, Who revealed to us why we are here and where we are going.

So where are we going? To be blunt, we are all on our way to the grave. A dash on a tombstone begins at birth and points to the day of death. “[T]he living know that they will die” (Ecclesiastes 9:5). “[I]t is appointed for men to die once” (Hebrews 9:27). Yet, the day of physical death is not the end.

After reminding man to reflect upon our origins at the hand of the Creator, Solomon revealed that man’s “spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Just as Rachel’s soul departed her body at death (Genesis 35:18), so does the spirit of every man (James 2:26)—not to go out of existence, but to enter the Creator’s eternal, spirit realm to await Judgment. Twice in the final 16 verses of Ecclesiastes we learn that “God will bring you into judgment” (11:9). In fact, “God will bring every work into judgement, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (12:14). Indeed, “God will judge both the righteous and the wicked man, for a time for every matter and for every deed is **there**” (3:17, NASB)—at the judgment seat of God.

After instructing the Athenians about where they came from (“we are the offspring of God”—Acts 17:29), the apostle Paul logically directed their attention to where we are going: God has “appointed **a day on which He will judge the world** in righteousness by the Man Whom He has ordained” (Acts 17:31), the Son of God, to Whom the Father “has committed all judgment” (John 5:22). The coming Judgment is a constant theme in the New Testament. In fact, when the Judge previously came to Earth as our Savior, He repeatedly warned mankind (especially in His parables) of His coming Judgment. From the wheat and tares to the dragnet (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43,47-50), from the rich fool to the wicked vinedressers (Luke 12:13-21; Matthew 21:33-40), and from the wise and foolish virgins to the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:1-46), Jesus continually reminded man where we are going.

Just prior to Judgment, “**the Son of man shall come in his glory**, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another” (Matthew 25:31-32, ASV). No one knows when this time will come (Matthew 24:36). In fact, “the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night” (2 Peter 3:10)—suddenly and unexpectedly.

The Bible speaks of “**the time of your stay** upon earth” (1 Peter 1:17, NASB). Like “a stay” at a hotel for a brief period of time, we are all just passing through this world. This planet is not our home, but only a temporary residence. If this physical realm lasts much longer, we are all going to die. But whether we die prior to Jesus’ return or whether He comes in our lifetime (and we avoid physical death), **we are all going somewhere forever**—we are returning to our Maker (Ecclesiastes 12:7); we are going to Judgment. And then, we are either going to receive eternal life or eternal punishment; we are going to heaven or hell (Matthew 25:46).

## QUESTION #4—HOW DO I GET THERE?

Realizing that every person will ultimately end up in either heaven or hell, the next logical, all-important question to ask is, “How?” How do we get from here to there?

Virtually no one professes that they actually **want** to go to hell, yet the path leading there is quite broad, and “many are those who enter” it in many different ways (Matthew 7:13). How exactly?

- By refusing to acknowledge where we came from.<sup>20</sup>
- By doing little-to-nothing—like the lazy servant in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30).
- By rejecting the spiritual (and practical) wisdom of God and going full-steam ahead with a materialistic lifestyle. As Ecclesiastes highlights, a focus on earthly wisdom, prosperity, and worldly pleasures is a recipe for spiritual disaster.
- By doing whatever “I think” is best. Rather than listen to God, man often does what is “right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). Yet, “the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). Indeed, “[t]here is a way that seems right to a man, but **its end is the way of death**” (Proverbs 14:12).
- In short, by sinning and not wholly trusting in the Lord—Who is the one and only answer to the sin (and punishment) problem.<sup>21</sup>

Similar to how God set “life and death, blessing and cursing” before the Israelites (prior to their entrance into the land of Canaan—Deuteronomy 30:19), God sets spiritual life and death before us all and pleads with us to “choose life.” God doesn’t want **anyone** to perish (2 Peter 3:9). He “desires all men to be saved” (1 Timothy 2:4). From the moment wretched sin entered the world, God began revealing His answer to the sin problem (Genesis 3:15; 12:1-3). Following thousands of years of Old Testament promises and prophecies pointing to the ultimate “Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), “God sent forth His Son” to redeem the slaves of sin and allow them to become His saved-from-sin children (Galatians 4:4-5). “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16-17). Indeed, God is so loving that He not only warned us of the eternal consequences of unforgiven sin, but even when we succumbed to sin, God took upon Himself the just punishment for our sins, that we might be saved! So why will many people still go to eternal hell? Because they **choose** to. Because they “trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was [they were] sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace” (Hebrews 10:29).

### Our Overall Response to God In General Terms

The Bible is all about God, His plan to save man, and what He requires from us in response. In general terms, God calls us to do what Solomon concluded 3,000 years ago about the “whole matter”: “Fear God and keep His commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Another way of stating what our general response to God should be is found in Solomon’s words in Proverbs 3:5-7: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.... Fear the Lord and depart from evil.” Or, we could rightly summarize the essence of faithfulness (under Judaism and Christianity) with these challenging words from Jesus (Who was quoting the Old Testament<sup>22</sup>): “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40).

### Our Initial Response to God In Specific Terms

How do I get there—to heaven, that is? How do I go from being lost in sin to being saved by the grace of God? In other words, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30; 2:38; 22:10).

Specifically, God wants us to hear His saving Gospel message and believe it (Romans 10:14,17; John 8:24; Acts 15:7). He wants us to recognize our sinful ways and humbly repent of them (Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30). He wants us to confess a sincere belief in Christ on our way to becoming a child of God. (In the past 2,000 years, many people have been put to death for uttering the simple phrase, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” In the 21st century, it carries no less weight.) By confessing Jesus as the Son of God and as Lord and Savior, we are saying that we have stopped living for ourselves and started living for the King of kings, the Master of our souls.<sup>23</sup> The apostle Paul observed: “With the mouth confession is made to salvation” (Romans 10:10).

After confessing a sincere belief in Jesus, we have one simple yet profound step to take in order to become a child of God: be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Just as Saul was commanded to be immersed in water in order to “wash away” his sins by the blood of Christ (Acts 22:16), so must we (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21). As Christ died, was buried, and rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), when we are baptized we “die” to sin, are buried in water, and rise to live a new life as a Christian (Romans 6:3-4).

### **Press On, Help Others, and Look Forward to Where We’re Going**

The New Testament epistles of Romans through Revelation were written to a diverse group of individual Christians and churches. They may be generally summarized with these words: grow in your commitment to the Lord as you await His return, and help others become and remain faithful.

Although living a committed Christian life can be tough, we will be able to accomplish all things that He has called us to do through Christ Who gives us strength (Philippians 4:13). We can confidently “walk in the light as He is in the light,” and know that “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.... If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7,9). We can live forgiven and guilt-free, and know that we are saved (1 John 5:13). “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).<sup>24</sup>

Faithful Christians can actually look forward (without any dread) to where we are going—to the end of time and the return of Jesus. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also **eagerly wait** for the Savior the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20). “To those who **eagerly wait** for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Hebrews 9:28). Thus, “[w]e are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:8-10).

Along the way, we have the blessed privilege to help others in their journey to meet Jesus at Judgment. There is no better way to love our neighbors as ourselves than to help them get to heaven. Like Paul, let’s become “all things to all men,” that we might “by all means save some.” Let’s seek “the other’s well-being” that, in the end, “they may be saved” (1 Corinthians 9:22; 10:24,33).

## **CONCLUSION**

We have now come full circle; we can end where we began. Since we can know where we came from, where we are going, and how to get there, we can absolutely know **why** we are here. Our lives are not meaningless. We are not mere molecules, DNA, or “dust in the wind.” The life of every individual human being is precious and important because of where we came from and where we are going. **Our purpose is to prepare our souls for eternity and to help others do the same.**

In a world of so much unbelief, doubt, despair, confusion, and insecurity, the God-revealed, crystal-clear, soul-stirring answers to the four most fundamental questions of life desperately need to be heard. Thoughtful meditation on these truths can clear away the fog of unbelief and refocus our lives around what really matters—the true meaning of life.

## **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 5:8; John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:33; cf. Romans 15:33; 16:20; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 15:4-5; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 1:5.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Dawkins (1995), “God’s Utility Function,” *Scientific American*, 273[5]:85, November, emp. added.

<sup>6</sup> Graham Lawton (2016), “What is the Meaning of Life?” *New Scientist*, 231[3089]:33, September 3, emp. added.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., emp. added.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., emp. added.

<sup>9</sup> “The Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Ecclesiastes 1:1).

<sup>10</sup> Lawton, p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> "Wretched: Nothing Made Everything" (2006), [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=sK2yNkTuJkY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=sK2yNkTuJkY), emp. added.

<sup>12</sup> "Curiosity: Did God Create the Universe?" (2011), *Discovery Channel*, August 7, emp. added.

<sup>13</sup> For these and other reasons, see Eric Lyons and Kyle Butt (2014), "7 Reasons to Believe in God," <http://apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=12&article=5045>.

<sup>14</sup> For a plethora of evidence for the existence of God and the divine inspiration of the Bible, see [www.apologeticspress.org](http://www.apologeticspress.org).

<sup>15</sup> For a lengthy discussion on what it means to be created in God's image, see Eric Lyons (2002), "In the 'Image and Likeness of God' [Parts 1 & 2]," <https://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=149> and <https://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=151>.

<sup>16</sup> The Greek word *esmen* is the first person plural of *eimi* (to be). This recognition of being God's offspring served as a basis for his argument as the next verse indicates: "Being then the offspring of God..." (Acts 17:29).

<sup>17</sup> All bold text in Scripture quotations has been added for emphasis.

<sup>18</sup> The English verb "are made" (ASV) derives from the Greek *gegonotas*, which is the perfect participle of the verb *ginomai*. The perfect tense in Greek is used to describe an action brought to completion in the past, but whose effects are felt in the present [see William Mounce (1993), *Basics of Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 219].

<sup>19</sup> W.B. Provine and Phillip E. Johnson (1994), "Darwinism: Science or Naturalistic Philosophy?" *Origins Research*, 16[1], Fall/Winter, [www.arn.org/docs/orpages/or161/161main.htm](http://www.arn.org/docs/orpages/or161/161main.htm).

<sup>20</sup> Romans 1:28; Hebrews 11:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9.

<sup>21</sup> Romans 6:23; 3:23; John 3:16-17; 14:6; Acts 4:12.

<sup>22</sup> Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18.

<sup>23</sup> Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:1-23; Philippians 1:21; Matthew 16:24-27.

<sup>24</sup> For helpful material on learning what it means to live the Christian life and the responsibilities that Christians have, see Kyle Butt's book, *Your Wonderful New Life in Christ* (<https://store.apologeticspress.org/collections/books/products/apbkkb0030>), as well as Jeff Miller's booklet, *Helpful Tools as You Begin Building Your Christian Life* (<https://store.apologeticspress.org/collections/books/products/helpful-tools-as-you-begin-building-your-christian-life>).

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