

What is the Meaning of Life?

By Jeremy de Haan

It's perhaps a morbid thought, but if we reflect on what Scripture says about murder, it's amazing what we can discover about the meaning of life.

Life, as you can imagine, is quite popular. We live on a planet that is full of life. There's life in the skies, life on the ground, life in the seas, and life, like bacteria, within life. This abundance of life on our world has caused people to wonder whether or not there are other worlds that have life, too. But if we are looking for life on other worlds, what exactly are we looking for? With all this life around us, you'd think that we'd be able to answer the question: what is life?

Google defines life as, "the condition that distinguishes animals and plants from inorganic matter." In other words, life is that thing that I have that rocks and books and carpets don't have. But that doesn't really answer the question. It still doesn't tell me what life *is*. What is this thing that I have that a rock doesn't have? What is it that makes the difference between a living body and a corpse? The short answer is, if we are looking for a materialist definition of life, then there isn't one. Life is a mystery that cannot be understood only in scientific terms.

This inability to understand life also affects man's ability to understand murder. On the one hand, everyone knows that murder is wrong. Google defines murder as: "the unlawful premeditated killing of one human being by another." It's unlawful. On the other hand, if human beings arose merely from the dust of the universe the same way that rocks arose

from the dust of the universe, by the random bumping of one atom against another, then there is simply no reason why hitting a person is any different from hitting a rock. If that is all that human life is, then there is no reason why murder should be wrong.

But we can also reason from the other direction. If we know *why* murder is wrong, then we can also understand something about the meaning of life. And the reason why murder is wrong is just what Scripture gives us. The command not to murder is an ancient command. It predates the law of Moses; it predates the covenant with Abraham. It was when humanity was to begin anew, following the Flood, that God forbade murder. He said to Noah, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed." Shedding the blood of man is wrong, as Google can tell you. But God then gives what Google cannot give. He gives the reason: "For God made man in his own image." Taking human life is wrong because human life was made in the image of God. There is something about life, then, that has to do with God's image.

You can ask my Dogmatics professor for a full explanation of "the image of God." But for this meditation we'll have to make do with something simpler. The image of God, the LORD told Noah, is corrupted somehow by murder, which is what makes murder so heinous. But Scripture also tells us that murder is much more than just shedding man's blood. The apostle John writes in 1 John 3:15, "Everyone who *hates his brother* is a murderer." John writes those words within a larger passage in which he exhorts us to a fellowship of love with each

other. The wicked thing about hatred is that it disrupts that fellowship of love. Murder, then, at its root, is a breaking of fellowship. God tells us that murder is wrong because it corrupts the image of God, and John tells us that murder is wrong because it breaks fellowship. There is something, then, about fellowship with each other that reflects the image of God.

And that is because God himself is a Triune being. He is three Persons dwelling perfectly as one being. There is no disharmony in the Trinity. There has never been a moment of broken fellowship in the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit commune perfectly with each other. It is perfect friendship.

It is this friendship, this fellowship that is actually the whole point of the gospel. To refer again to John's first letter, he writes this in chapter 1:3: "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." We brought you the gospel, John

writes, so that you can have fellowship with us, and the fellowship that we have is with the Father and the Son. So to turn this around, the fellowship that God enjoys in himself has been shared with the apostles, and they in turn have shared it with us through the gospel.

Perfect fellowship with God is the life that the gospel promises. Perfect friendship with the Triune God is the "life" part of eternal life. It is this friendship that beckons our hearts toward growth in holiness and, ultimately, perfection. This is the radical opposite of murder. This is the meaning of life, that meaning that so eludes modern thinkers. What is life? Life is nothing other than being in the welcoming presence of the Triune God. To behold his face, to bask in his light, that is life everlasting, and that is the reward freely offered to us in Christ.



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