

Where In the World Did this Come From?

We're continuing in our series where we're looking at your worldview. Bertrand Russell said, "Unless you assume a God the question of life's purpose is meaningless." If there is no God, if this is all just made up, if we've been conned, if everything in the world is an accident, just random chance, with no rhyme or reason, no designer, no creator, then life has no essential worth; no real significance or purpose. If we're just a result of random chance, there's no real right or wrong.

If there's no reason, no purpose, no source of meaning, that's a formula for despair. So today we're going to look at what it means to take seriously what God says about who you are, where you came from and, most importantly, the profound implications of all that. The facts of the matter are basic. It's the implications that have real consequences for how we live and think.

The first thing to keep firmly in mind is that God created everything. That's pretty basic huh? We'll look at the implications today. In the first verse of the first chapter of the first book of the Bible it says, *"In the beginning, God."* God existed before the universe, before anything. If you can't get past those four words then the rest of it doesn't matter and life really has no particular significance. *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."* How long did that take? I have no idea. It could have taken a second or ten trillion years or more. But for me it really doesn't matter. God could take as little or as much time as God wanted. For a being who created time, time just isn't a limiting factor.

2 Peter 3:8 says, *"...you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day."* Peter said it's like it - he wasn't being literal, that a day means exactly a thousand years. He's saying God isn't constrained by time. It makes no difference to God.

Did God use some form of evolution? I don't know - but I do know it doesn't matter if God did. When God inspired the Bible, God told people what they could understand. The Bible doesn't teach about DNA or nuclear physics - the people God was speaking to didn't have words or ideas to understand or express that knowledge. The Bible doesn't spend any real time on how God created. It concentrates on why.

Isaiah says, "For the Lord is God, and he created the heavens and earth and put everything in place. He made the world to be lived in, not to be a place of empty chaos. 'I am the Lord,' he says, 'and there is no other.'" God made the earth to be inhabited. God created it to sustain and develop life; put it at the right distance from the sun on the right axis for life. Why did God do that? Hebrews 2:10 says, *"God, for whom and through whom everything was made, chose to bring many children into glory."* God created it all for and to have many children share it. It's clear that God wanted a family. God wasn't lonely; God didn't need us. God wanted us. God is love and we were created so God could love us.

Ephesians 1:4 says *"Even before he made the world, God loved us..."* God thought of the human race before anything else. You, as a human being, are unlike anything else God made. James 1:18 says, *"He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession."*

And God created you as a distinct and unique person. Psalm 139 says, *"You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it."* God custom designed you because God had a place and a purpose and a plan for you.

No one can explain God or explain what God has done. No one can earn what God has already given them or pay God back for it. Romans 11:34-35 says, *"...who can know the Lord's thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice? And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back?"* No one can tell God anything that God isn't already aware of. No one can give enough so they out-give God. So what should our response be? Just thank God.

So what are the implications of all of this? There are five implications that have profound impact on your life when you understand them. I want to focus on them now:

1. Life Has Sacred Worth. Your life is sacred. That means it's special, set apart, dedicated to a special use. Your life has sanctity because human beings are uniquely different from the rest of creation. Genesis 1 says, *"So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."*

God designed you in God's image. That makes us distinct from the rest of creation. We have free moral choice - we choose between right and wrong. You have a conscious. You can talk to God; pray to God. Being made

in the image of God makes you closer to God. Psalm 8:4-5 says, "...*what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor.*"

God put you here because God wanted to love you and for you to learn to love God back. God loves it when you talk with God. If my kids had grown up in my home and never wanted to talk with me that would break my heart. But people go days, weeks, months without really talking to God. They don't tell God they love him; that they're thankful to be alive. They never get to know God, never develop their relationship.

2. Life Has Amazing Value. Everybody wants to feel that their life matters; that their life is worth something; has value; has significance. You want to feel like your life counts.

We all want a sense of self-respect, self-esteem and dignity in our lives, but we try all kinds of wrong things to find them; we look in the wrong places. You don't get self-esteem from wealth. You don't get self-respect from fame. You don't get dignity from physical beauty. True dignity; real self-esteem is much, much deeper than those things. If you try to find worth or significance from any of them you end up deeply disappointed. You can have money, power, fame, beauty, and still feel like a fake inside. You were made for more.

So where does real dignity, real self-esteem, real significance come from? They come from realizing what God sacrificed for you. When you realize that God considered you valuable enough to die for, it makes a difference. God considers you valuable enough to die for.

The Bible says, "...*God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.*" Want to know how valuable you are? The cross is how valuable you are to God. You're worth going through pain and suffering; worth dying for. That's how much you're worth.

In life, things are only worth what someone's willing to pay for them. If you have a car to sell, it's only worth what someone's willing to pay. If no one's willing to pay what you think it's worth, you're not going to get it.

Beanie Babies were a huge fad a few years ago and the price of certain types kept going up - some to incredibly high prices. There was even a full scale magazine devoted just to Beanie Babies! In 1998 that magazine was thicker than Glamour or Fortune and sold 650,000 copies a month at a newsstand price of \$5.99. The heart of the magazine was the price survey that told you the current value of each type. It was its own little stock market!

For a short time in 1995 a royal blue Peanut the Elephant, which was only produced in limited quantities, could sell for over \$3000. The good times were never going to stop rolling, that is, until they promptly stopped rolling. By 1999, the craze lost steam. By 2000 the hysteria was dead.

Certain rare Beanies still have some value, but they're far below their peak and those examples are exceptions; most Beanies today are worth a few bucks at most.

Value is determined by what someone's willing to pay for it. God was willing to pay for you, with God's own Son. With God's own life. God said, I'd rather die than live without you. When you realize what God did for you, you should never again worry about low self-esteem or lack of dignity.

That's why 1 Peter 2:17 says, "*Respect everyone.*" It says that because everyone you meet is loved by God. You'll never meet anyone that Jesus wasn't willing to die for. They may not believe or accept it but Jesus died for them. Even if they don't accept it, God valued them enough to do it for them. Treat them with dignity because God created them, loves them and died for them.

That means believers and non believers; people you agree with or disagree with; old people, young people; women and men; Republicans, Democrats and Independents. Don't talk to me about who's right - we're all wrong, just in different ways. If we don't stop what we're doing on the political scene our country will decline because we're not treating one another with respect. I don't see much respect in either party on the political scene. It's not a matter of agreeing with someone, it means treating everyone with dignity whether you agree with them or not. Treat them with dignity because Jesus died for them - even if they don't know that at this point.

Another thing that gives us dignity as believers is that the Holy Spirit lives in us. When you become a believer, God puts the Spirit inside you. It's God present with you, helping you, growing you, guiding you, comforting you. 1 Corinthians 6 says, "*Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself.*" A lot of times you'll hear athletes say on TV or at the gym, "My body is a temple," I want to ask, "A temple of what? What kind of god is inside that temple? Is it just you,

yourself?" When anybody says, I believe my body is a temple, they're quoting the Bible but only one part of the verse. Your body is a temple - a home for the Holy Spirit. It's not a temple for just anything. It's for God's Spirit. Your body doesn't belong to you. It belongs to God. If that's true, treat it with the dignity God's belongings deserve.

3. Life's Troubles Have Benefits. Even our problems have purpose. Even our messes have meaning. But you rarely see it while you're in it - you usually have to wait until you get out of it and look back. Then you can see a whole lot better. But there's meaning in it and God's purpose for your life is bigger than the problems you're going through.

Remember the TV show MacGyver? The guy could make anything out of practically nothing. He could use anything for his purpose. He'd take lipstick, a bottle of carrot juice, a C battery, an shoe, chewing gum and some duct tape and make a bomb! He could use anything around him for his purpose.

God out-MacGyvers, MacGyver! God can take everything in your life – the good, the bad, nasty stuff, fun stuff, bizarre stuff, hurtful stuff and use it all for good in your life. God doesn't cause our problems so don't blame God. We create them ourselves - for ourselves and for other people, directly and indirectly. God permits it because God gave us free choice, but then God works to use those problems for good. God has good intentions even when people have bad intentions.

A great example of this is the story of Joseph in the Bible. His envious brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. For years everything goes wrong. He's doing the right thing; trusting God. He has integrity. But he's falsely accused of rape and thrown into prison. Then, through a series of circumstances, he becomes powerful in Egypt. When famine comes he saves the day and he's a hero. Ironically his brothers come to get grain from a man they don't realize is their brother.

When they find out, the brothers think they're dead meat but Joseph says something amazing; a mark of his maturity. He says in Genesis 50:20 *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people."* He said you meant to hurt me, but God made it good.

There have been people who intended to hurt you. They hurt you with words or by what they did. But God intends to bring good out of it, if you'll give it to God and trust.

But let me say this: God is more interested in your character than in your comfort. When you get to heaven it's going to be comfortable. Right now is character building time. Romans 8:28 says, *"...we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them."* Not everything is good. But everything can work together for those who love God and are trying to live God's purpose.

If you're not loving God and trying to follow God's purpose, everything does not work for good in your life. God owes you nothing if you're doing your own thing. But those who love God and strive to follow God's ways, find that God will take the things that happen to them, even the stupid stuff they cause themselves, and use it for good.

4. Life Has a Mission. We are placed on Earth with a mission. The largest part of that mission is to increase our ability to love, but it's in the expression of that love, in actions you take, that your mission becomes meaningful. Everyone's mission is unique because of the different ways God has made us and so we go about our mission in different ways. You have your own mission - your own way to spread God's love around you. Increasing the love people can experience.

Your mission is generally not being an accountant, a writer, a builder, a mechanic or an airline pilot. Any one of those, or thousands of other professions, may be part of your mission, but they are typically just the means by which you find opportunities to fulfill your life mission.

In living out our mission, Jesus told us that whatever we do, the good work we do must ALWAYS be focused on showing people the light of God's presence and bringing glory to God. In Matthew 5:14-16 he told us *"You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."* Our mission is meant to light the world.

But your individual mission is not lived out alone. It is lived in harmony with God's people. Paul was an incredibly gifted and effective individual. He certainly could have claimed that he was uniquely gifted. Instead

he said things like this: *"...who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. For we are both God's workers..."* Each had their own work, a share in the mission, but that mission was connected. Believers never live or serve in isolation.

And our mission must be cooperative, never competitive; united, never in opposition. 1 Corinthians 1:10 says, *"I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose."* Each life has meaning, mission and purpose, but it's not a solitary pursuit. Our mission is personal but it is never private.

5. Life Continues into Eternity. It's not going to end here on earth. Because you were made in God's image that means there's far more to life than just what's here and now. God made you to last forever. Your heart is going to stop and your body functions will shut down one day. But that will not be the end of you. You have a spirit and that spirit will go on into eternity. God's grace draws us into God's family here and then we get to hang out with God forever. Psalm 23 says, *"Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever."* God wants you to be a part of God's family. That's why you were created.

Ephesians 1 tells us. *"And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth."* God's going to bring everything together.

Now, God's not going to force you to be a part of God's family. You have to choose to be part of it. God won't force you to love, know and trust God, to do God's purpose and to care for other people and invite them into the family. God gives you the choice to reject what God is offering. But you have to be willing to live with the consequences for eternity.

Next week the big event in Hollywood will be the Oscars. All week long they'll have big parties. The big question for celebrities will be, which parties are you're going to. People want to make sure they're on the A list. You don't want to be on the B list. You want to be at the A list parties.

But the thing is, all creation is preparing for the biggest event ever - the time when history on earth ends and eternity begins. God's going to gather those who've chosen to be God's children and have a party that will last for eternity. The Bible says: *"For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are."*

The most important question you'll ever be asked is, is your name going to be on that list? You don't want to miss it. You don't want the people around you in our community to miss it. God has extended an open invitation. John 1:12 says *"...to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God."*

It's our choice. We can live a life with purpose, or we can live without God's purpose. I just don't have enough faith to be an atheist. It takes far more faith to believe that everything just kind of happened. But most of all, I reject the implications of rejecting God. That's not living. That's barely existing.