



Is there more to who I am?

Psalm 8

There are many experiences that cross our pathway which force us to ask questions about whether life has an enduring purpose. There is a degree of both frustration and searching when we conclude, 'Is there more to life than this?' People often ask the question at difficult times. My first question is – 'Is there more to who I am?'

- The joy of a child's arrival in the world and then the reality that he or she doesn't sleep. 'I party at 2am!'
- A young person struggling with identity and relationships
- In working life, when we fail to get the breaks that lead to promotion
- The premature death of a close friend, colleague or family member.

At such times we find ourselves led to ask deeper questions about life's purpose. 'Is there more to life than this?' begins to question our ultimate purpose! I have been considering some of these issues, which we shall explore together over the next four weeks. An initial conclusion is that we have not given enough serious consideration to the basic questions, which has led to us being stumped on the more complex issues.

- Who would think of trying to read a novel without knowledge of the alphabet?
- With all our technology today, the first basic premise is to be able to understand numbers.

As a Christian, I can't move into a serious consideration of the things of God without asking 'Who am I?'

Just to be clear, looking for an understanding of life does not mean a simplistic and naïve understanding of God and his world. I reckon many of us will have heard of the bumper sticker which declared 'Don't follow me – I'm lost!' This is a vivid reminder of how many people journey through life and find themselves in a futile search for meaning.

Leo Tolstoy, the famous Russian novelist, described how he found it impossible to escape from the question of meaning and purpose in life:

'What is life for? To die? No, I am afraid. To wait for death till it comes? I fear that even more. Then I must live. But what for?'

The 'what for?' question is the most decisive of all and one that none of us can avoid both asking and exploring in our daily lives.

The Christian contribution is undervalued by many. For nine years, I was minister of a church with a long drive. We had signboards and a wayside pulpit which read: 'Carpenter needs joiners – Apply within.' A passing businessman drove his car into our car park and he told us he was a joiner and he was looking for the carpenter. For me, it raised issues such as:

- We can no longer assume people understand our language
- Folks are looking but we are frequently not connecting or prepared to give significant answers



- We must find a way of explaining who and what Jesus Christ is about in today's setting.

I remind you of the Psalm that was read earlier. It is a superb outburst of wondering worship. It would have been a good song at the grape harvest and some have suggested this may have been its original setting. It both opens and closes in adoring worship, but in between is the perennial question – 'What are mere mortals that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?' (Psalm 8:4)

We are exploring the meaning of human experience. Lots of things throw us back on ourselves, but it happens for me:

- When I conduct a suicide memorial service and I read the cards and notes on our wall of remembrance
- When I get a call from an older couple in regional Australia who believe their son is homeless in Sydney and they cannot find him
- When I talk with a widow who tearfully tells me, 'Bill worked all his life and, on the day before he was due to retire, he died!'

This text in Psalm 8 offers the suggestion that human purpose is wrapped up in God's care.

God's care for human beings has been shown throughout the history of our world

I have a friend who is an astro-physicist, who often presents on the theme of the vastness of the universe and God's care for human life in Jesus Christ. Both the clearest teaching of the Bible and the perception of great minds indicate that the human experience has a unique part to play in the created order. So the answer to the question 'Is there more to who I am?' is – 'Yes, of course there is!'

Jacob Bronowski, in the 1960s, wrote about 'The Identity of Man'. He declared, 'Man is a part of nature in the same sense that a stone is, or a cactus or a camel.' This conclusion suggests human beings are not unique – just complex. I think this falls short of what we need to know.

The Bible teaches from beginning to end that human life was created for God and so let us not be surprised that, as people ditch the idea of God, they find fulfilment difficult to attain.

- Cultures must be judged on how they treat people
- Abortion cannot be a form of birth control; neither should euthanasia be legalised. Many of us have come to understand that, even in the most testing of circumstances, lives have displayed much quality
- People arriving on our shore in boats cannot be considered merely a nuisance, when one is aware of the horrendous situations from which they have fled
- These and many more issues expose the importance of the question 'Is there more to life?'

A lack of common ground to discuss morality will always occur when we jettison the very things that will explain our purpose. The gospel teaches that every human life is sacred, but this is established in no more than a minority of minds.



It was Lennon and McCartney who penned 'Nowhere Man' – a searching song by The Beatles:

He's a real nowhere man, living in his nowhere land,
Making all his nowhere plans for nobody.
Doesn't have a point of view,
Knows not where he's going to;
Isn't he a bit like me and you.

There is a problem to be addressed

The word 'problem' has negative connotations, but it is an honest word. The human condition is what leads the Psalmist to ask, 'Despite everything we are ... why are you still concerned about us?' We have our defects, moods, obsessions and our complexes. The human experience can involve disturbing and contradictory desires. Something has gone wrong and, if we were created for God, then we function for ourselves.

'Being lost' is one of the images that we use to describe what is wrong. Human beings without a vital relationship to God are lost in the maze of life.

We cannot use language of another age and expect twenty-first century people to understand what we mean if we position ourselves in Town Hall Square and shout, 'You're all sinners!' This may be confusing and will certainly alienate more folks than it will ever win.

But I know this:

- No person that has ever dealt with human relationships would fail to understand
- No person in business or commercial life would fail to understand
- No person in education or government would fail to understand
- No person involved in the caring agencies or vocational life would fail to understand.

You may ask, 'What would they not fail to understand?' That there is a marred human condition and a transparent selfishness about the way we live.

In 2017 I shall be speaking at a hotel/conference centre at Grange-over-Sands on the Cumbrian coast of England. It is renowned for its wide expanse of sand in the estuary. There are only a few ways of crossing – women and men are appointed as guides to assist others to cross in safety. Some have been caught in the sinking sand and lost their lives. It is dangerous and the more you struggle, the faster you sink. Similarly, there is no way out of this selfishness in our own strength and it has tainted the whole human predicament.

Christian people are not exempt from the arrogance of selfishness. These stern words were found in a letter written 'To the Editor': 'It makes me highly indignant to see so many heathens, agnostics, sceptics, and atheists taking a rest on a Christian holiday.' It went on to conclude, 'Such people should be stopped from having time off at Easter until they remember this is a Christian festival.' This is hardly an appealing invitation to church!

God has made provision for our care



The substantial nature of Christian experience is about 'restoration'. The word conjures up many delightful examples:

- The patient skill of solvent and scalpel used to restore a great piece of art
- The quiet craftsmanship which takes apart a battered piece of furniture and makes it new.

God's desire is to restore human nature. Through all our ceaseless activity, God is really saying to us, 'I want to restore you!'

We in the Christian community need to be ready to acknowledge the truth of the good news. There are some truths which we often ignore – one is that Christianity has been useful to too many who have failed to really believe it.

Political power gained by tipping the hat at religion has been found wanting in many contexts throughout the world.

It is certainly true that the church has not always been a good example of God's transforming power:

- An unfortunate message was found outside a church, 'Why let worry kill you off – let the Church help.'
- The Christian church produces its own brand of neurotics and some religious people are the last people you would turn to for help
- We have separated Word and deed in such a way that forgets 'faith without works is dead'.

God's loving, caring and saving power is what changes our lives. It requires on our part open hands and empty hands to receive what he has to offer to each of us.

- Acknowledge that God loves and cares for you
- Believe that God has done something in Jesus Christ in throwing his arms around you
- Consider carefully what it will mean to take a fresh stand for God – or perhaps for the first time
- Do something about it!

It can happen in a moment. I knew three ministers of God, of whom only one is alive, who all heard the call of Jesus Christ in an open air meeting and were changed forever at the close of that meeting.

It can also take a lifetime – Bill and Gladys Smith received a letter in 1988 sent through the mail and stamped March 1938. Where had it been? Does that matter? It got there in the end.

Is there more to who I am?

- Than my name
- Than my address
- Than my character.



We can sum up human experience in terms of the length of a person's life, but that is not adequate – for some lives are but a short story. We can sum up human experience in terms of public achievement, but we all know that there are many apparently successful people who have led confused and at times self-destructive lives. We can sum up human experience in terms of happy families, but that opportunity is not given to all – so it remains an insufficient measure.

Is there more to who I am? Well of course there is – and it is our lives lived in the full purpose of God who loved this world so much that he gave his only Son for us – and he can remake us for his purpose.

We do like to solve issues ourselves and it is tough when we discover we cannot do everything on our own. On the biggest matter of all - that of discovering our purpose, value and relationship with God, we need his help. It is not a sign of weakness to acknowledge that we need his assisting grace.