ARISE College Convention 2024 - George Bassilios

- Lecture 1: The Meaninglessness of Life without God
- Lesson 2: Our Emptiness and His Fullness
- Lecture 3: Discerning God's Voice
- Lecture 4: Developing a Relationship with God

Lecture 1: The Meaninglessness of Life without God

One of the most fundamental questions in humanity: what is the meaning of life?

"Judging whether life is worth living amounts to answering the most fundamental question of philosophy. I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living. I see others paradoxically getting killed for the ideas that give them a reason for living. I therefore conclude that the meaning of life is the most urgent of questions." - Albert Camus

"Clinics are crowded with people suffering from a new kind of neurosis, a sense of total and ultimate meaninglessness of life." - Viktor Frankl

Why should we ask questions about the meaning of life?

- Meaning gives us purpose; purpose gives us meaning
- It will shape the way we live our life

<missed 30min>

Humanism, Materialism, Hedonism and cannot give meaning in life

Power, Money and Sex: How Success Almost Ruined My Life - Deion Sanders

- Had it all, won a Superbowl and couldn't figure out how to celebrate because life had no meaning. Couldn't buy anything to put the emptiness away. His lawyer told him that Jesus gives him meaning, and he became a believer

Atheists who found life has no meaning:

- "It is meaningless that we are born; it is meaningless that we die. We are empty bubbles floating on the sea of nothingness." - Jean Paul Sartre
- "Life is a disease and the only difference between one man, and another is the stage of the disease at which he lives." - George B. Shaw
- "We must build our lives upon the firm foundation of unyielding despair." - Bertrand Russell
- "We're just a bit of pollution... if you got rid of us... the universe would be largely the same. We're completely irrelevant." - Lawrence Krauss
- "The universe at the bottom has no design, no purpose, no evil and no good. Nothing but blind pitiliess indifference." - Richard Dawkins

If there's no God, then the universe came by chance --> if it's by chance, then there's no design --> if there's no design, there's no purpose --> if there's no purpose, there's no meaning

Meaning comes from purpose; purpose from design; design from a Designer

Why can't humanism, materialism and hedonism give life meaning?

Nothing less than yourself can satisfy you. And nothing in the world is greater than you, for you are made in God's image, filled with His Spirit, abiding in His Son. Only God is. We are "not of this world" - so this world cannot satisfy us.

What is the world to us?

This world is a pointer to what lies beyond the world.

Example:

- You are driving down a highway and very hungry, then you see a sign: "Food next exit."
- What would you say if you found someone just as hungry but they went to the sign and held it, hoping to quench their hunger and thirst from the sign?

"We don't belong here. We have somehow lost our way. This makes our present existence both strange and splendid. Strange because it is not where our true destiny lies; splendid, because it points ahead to where that real hope is found. But if we mistake the signpost for what is signposted, we will attach our hopes to lesser goals, which cannot finally quench our thirst for meaning and joy." - Alister McGrath

Samaritan Woman:

- The woman was thirsty, living in sin
- The Lord told her when you drink of this water (this water that you pull up from the world), you will still be thirsty

It is "life under the Son" that gives "life under the Sun" ultimate meaning

Lesson 2: Our Emptiness and His Fullness

The Problem of Spiritual Emptiness

"About the third of my cases are suffering from no clinically definable neurosis but from the emptiness of their lives." - Carl Jung

"The biggest problem among today's students is emptiness" - Derek Bok

"When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, I will return to my house from which I came. And when he comes, he finds it **empty**, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So, shall it be among this generation"

Signs of Spiritual Emptiness

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Stress
- Directionless
- Lack of motivation
- Hopelessness
- Identity Crisis
- Purposelessness
- Meaninglessness

Cures for Spiritual Emptiness

"I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for you... to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:19)

Eastern Religions

- Hinduism's goal is to lose your self in Brahman - the state of extinction (annihilation of self)
- Buddhism's goal is to reach enlightenment (Nirvana)

Christianity

"Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be **filled** with the Spirit." (Ephesians 5:18)

From the Agpeya 3rd Hour:

- "Your Holy Spirit, O Lord, whom You sent forth upon Your holy disciples and honored apostles in the third hour, do not take away from us, O Good One, but **renew** Him within us."
- "O Lord, Who sent down Your Holy Spirit upon Your holy disciples and Your honored apostles in the third hour, do not take Him away from us, O Good One, but we ask You to **renew** Him within us."

What does it mean to "renew Him"?

How do I know that I am filled?

When I overflow with the same substance of which I am filled

When I become an instrument of peace to others, then I know I am filled with peace

Instruments/Agents/Conduits of the Holy Spirit

Lecture 3: Discerning God's Voice

God Speaks to Us

Does God speak to us? Of course! God is **always** speaking

- "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye." (Psalm 32:8)
- "Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live." (Isaiah 55:3)

How does God speak to us?

- Through the Scripture (the Word of God)
- The Holy Spirit (who abides in us) speaks to us through our conscience
- Your Father of Confession (spiritual guidance and counsel)
- Circumstances and Events and Actions (e.g. opening and closing doors, etc)
- You may be the answer to someone's prayer

Five Channels:

1. The Scripture
   - "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (1 Timothy 3:16)
   - It's good to read the Bible academically, theologically, didactically... but also important to read the Bible as a personal love letter from God to you
2. Prayer
   - Prayer is a two-way communication
   - Prayer opens the heart to hearing God's response
   - "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know." (Jeremiah 33:3)
3. Counsel
   - "Plans are established by counsel." (Proverbs 20:18)
   - Spiritual counsel, Abouna, my servant, etc.
4. Nature
   - "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1)
   - When you look at the Sunset, remember the Sunsetter
   - From Synxarion of the day: "St Barbara rose up her eyes to heaven from the top of the tower contemplating the beauty of the sky and what was in it: the sun, the moon, and the stars. She came to the conclusion that the universe must have an able and wise maker who is worthy of worship and honor."

5. Events
    1. "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Are we listening?

Barriers to Hearing God's Voice

Starts with the **desire to listen** to His voice; listening to God is a **purposeful** activity. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Mark 4:9, Revelation 2, 3).

Listening to God's voice is a **privilege** ("many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things which you see and have not heard them; and to hear the things which you hear and have not heard them.")

What are the barriers?

1. Distractions
    - Social media, constant notifications, earbuds, phones, noise, busy schedules, etc.
    - How can we hear God's voice in the midst of all of these distractions?
    - "Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore, tell her to help me." And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:40)
        - Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World - Joanna Weaver
    - "The Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains..., but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire **a still small voice**..." (1 Kings 19)
2. Pride
    - If I am self-reliant, will I WANT to hear God's voice? I won't need to hear from God because I already know what I need to do
    - The Pharisees
        - "But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi'."
3. Doubt
    - "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God... but let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord." (James 1:5-6)
    - Doubt vs. Questioning
        - St Mary Questioned
        - Zacharias Doubted

4. Impatience
    - Instant Gratification... I gave you some prayers on Tuesday night but didn't get an answer Wednesday morning. If He doesn't answer my prayer within 24 hours, He doesn't love me, care about me and doesn't exist"
    - "But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." (James 1:4)

These barriers are spiritual earplugs from hearing the voice of God

Overcoming the Barriers

- Digital Detox
    - What's the first thing you do in the morning? Reach for the phone
    - Take a weekend without phones
    - Plug your phone somewhere else
- Replacing bad habits with good habits
- How do you overcome doubt?
    - If He died for you, won't He guide you and speak to you and direct you in His path? It would be foolish to think
    - God does not play hard to get with us
    - God does not play hide and seek with us
    - A relationship with God is not a guessing game
- The Importance of Quiet Time
    - Setting aside focused and uninterrupted time **every day** where you can be "alone" with God
    - Start with 60min or 90min? No. Start with 2 min.
        - When someone says "I get bored in liturgy" - tell them to be FAITHFUL in the amount of time you CAN focus. If you can focus for 10min, be FAITHFUL in those 10min. and ask God to help you expand the time. In a short amount of time, you will find that you're telling Abouna he finished early!

Lecture 4: Developing a Relationship with God

Questions

- Do you know who God is, really?
- What do you know about Him?
- Does He exist in your life? If so, in what way?
- Where is He on your priority list?
- Do you have a relationship with Him?

To some people, God is...

- A resource center... a divine vending machine
  - Do you seek Him? Or do you seek His blessings?
  - Do I want to know you, Lord, or do I want to get something from you?
- A routine... a habit
- A theology...

How do I develop a relationship with God?

Who is God to me? How do I develop a relationship with Him?

1. Seek Him - actively pursue.
   - If you seek Him, you will find Him.
2. Find Him
3. Know Him
   - Communicate with Him
   - Visit His House Regularly
4. Love Him
   - "Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." (1 John 4:7-8)
   - "If you love Me, keep My commandments."
5. Follow Him
   - "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10:27)
   - "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." (Luke 9:23)
   - To do His commandments, to listen to Him, etc.
6. Be Like Him

What does it really mean to have a relationship with Christ?

Colossians 3:12-15