

Is a Meaningful Life Really Possible?

“The length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow.”

—Psalm 90:10, *New International Version*.

HOW true those words are! Life in this world is so often glutted with “trouble and sorrow.” Perhaps you have wondered, ‘Is it even possible to have a truly meaningful life now?’

Take, for example, Maria. She was always a very active person, but now, at the age of 84, she has become practically housebound. She is mentally active, but her body, it seems, no longer cooperates. How can she possibly feel that such a life is meaningful?

How about you? You may at some time have asked yourself whether *your* life is meaningful. Your work may be repetitive, tiring, and tedious. Your efforts or work may not be recognized. Even if you do have a measure of success, you may feel insecure regarding your future. At times, you may also feel lonely or depressed. Your family life may be marked by conflict and strife. You may have lost a loved one in death. A man named André was very close to his father, who suddenly fell ill and died. For André, it was a terrible blow, and it left a void that he feels will never be completely filled.

No matter what trouble we may face, there is something we desperately need to know: Is a meaningful life really possible? We can find the answer in the life of a man who walked the earth some 2,000 years ago—Jesus Christ. In spite of all the obstacles that confronted him, Jesus truly had a meaningful life. So can we if we follow his example.



Jesus

THE KEY TO A MEANINGFUL LIFE



DID Jesus really have a meaningful life? He evidently was brought up in humble surroundings, and throughout his life he had few of this world's goods. He actually had "nowhere to lay down his head." (Luke 9:57, 58) In addition, he was hated, slandered, and finally put to death by his enemies.

You may reason, 'Such a life is not what I think of as meaningful!' But there is more to Jesus' life that we do well to consider. Let us examine four aspects of his life.

1. JESUS HAD A PURPOSE IN LIFE —TO DO GOD'S WILL.

"My food is for me to do the will of him that sent me."—John 4:34.

By his words and actions, Jesus sought to fulfill the will of his heavenly Father, Jehovah.* Jesus found great joy in doing God's will. He actually compared doing so to food, as is shown in the scripture just quoted. Consider the circumstances under which he made that comparison.

Jesus spoke those words at about noontime.

* Jehovah is the name of God as revealed in the Bible.

(John 4:6) He had trekked through the hilly country of Samaria all morning, so he surely was hungry. In fact, his disciples had urged him: "Rabbi, eat." (John 4:31) By his answer, Jesus indicated that he really felt nourished and strengthened by doing God's work. Does that not sound like the kind of man whose life had meaning?

2. JESUS HAD INTENSE LOVE FOR HIS FATHER.

"I love the Father."—John 14:31.

Jesus had an extremely close relationship with his Father in heaven. Jesus' deep love for God impelled him to make known his Father—His name, purposes, and qualities. Through his words, actions, and attitudes, Jesus perfectly reflected his Father—to the point that we see in Jesus a living portrait of his Father. Thus, when Philip asked Jesus: "Show us the Father," Jesus replied: "He that has seen me has seen the Father also."—John 14:8, 9.

Jesus loved his Father so much that he was willing to obey him to the point of death. (Philippians 2:7, 8; 1 John 5:3) Such an intense love for God filled Jesus' life with meaning.



3. JESUS LOVED PEOPLE.

“No one has love greater than this, that someone should surrender his soul in behalf of his friends.”—John 15:13.

Our future life prospects as imperfect humans are admittedly grim. The Bible explains: “Through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men because they had all sinned.” (Romans 5:12) We cannot on our own escape the consequence of sin, namely death.—Romans 6:23.

Thankfully, Jehovah lovingly provided a solution to mankind’s situation. He allowed his perfect and sinless Son, who became known as Jesus, to suffer and die in order to provide the ransom needed to deliver mankind from slavery to sin and death. Jesus, moved by love for his Father *and for humans*, willingly complied and gave his perfect human life in our behalf. (Romans 5:6-8) Such unselfish love gave meaning to his life.*

* To learn more about the ransoming value of Jesus’ death, see chapter 5 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

4. JESUS KNEW THAT HE HAD HIS FATHER’S LOVE AND APPROVAL.

“This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved.”—Matthew 3:17.

Jehovah spoke those words from heaven at the time of Jesus’ baptism. Jehovah thus openly expressed affection for and approval of his Son, Jesus. No wonder Jesus could emphatically say: “The Father loves me!” (John 10:17) Knowing that he had his Father’s love and approval, Jesus faced opposition and criticism with confidence. He even maintained balance and emotional stability in the face of death. (John 10:18) Jesus’ sense of his own Father’s love and approval undoubtedly gave even greater meaning to his life.

Jesus certainly had a meaningful life. Clearly, we can learn much from him about how we can lead a life that has real meaning. The next article will consider some of the clear advice that Jesus gave his followers about how to live.

A Meaningful Life

JESUS SHOWS THE WAY

“Walk just as Jesus walked.” —1 John 2:6, *NET Bible*.

AS WE discussed in the preceding article, Jesus led a meaningful life. So if we want to fill our life with meaning, we do well to imitate his example and listen to his advice.

Jehovah, in fact, urges us to do just that, as the above scripture shows. Walking as Jesus walked involves patterning our entire way of life after his example and teachings. Doing so will help us to gain God’s approval and have a meaningful life.

Jesus’ teaching included principles that can help us to walk just as he walked. We find a number of these principles in his famous Sermon on the Mount. Let us consider a few of the principles and how we can apply them in our life.

PRINCIPLE: “Happy are those conscious of their spiritual need.”—Matthew 5:3.

HOW THE PRINCIPLE CONTRIBUTES TO A MEANINGFUL LIFE: Jesus indicated that humans have an innate spiritual need. We long to know the answers to such questions as these: Why are we here? Why is there so much suffering on this earth? Does God really care about us? Is there life after death? We need to know the answers to such questions in order to have a meaningful life. Jesus knew that there is only one reliable source that can answer those questions—God’s Word. In prayer to his Father, Jesus said: “Your word is truth.” (John 17:17) Can God’s Word really help us to satisfy our spiritual need?

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE: As the lead singer of a popular band, Esa was well on his way toward becoming a rock star. Even so, Esa felt that something was missing. “Although I enjoyed being in the band, I longed for more meaning in my life,” he says. In time, however, Esa came in contact

with one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. “I bombarded him with questions,” Esa admits. “His logical, Scriptural answers intrigued me, so I agreed to have him study the Bible with me.” What Esa learned from his study of the Bible touched his heart and moved him to dedicate his life to Jehovah. “In the past, I constantly drifted in and out of problems and crises,” he says. “Now I have a real purpose in life.”*

PRINCIPLE: “Happy are the merciful.”

—Matthew 5:7.

HOW THE PRINCIPLE CONTRIBUTES TO A MEANINGFUL LIFE: Mercy involves showing compassion to others, being kind and considerate toward them. Jesus showed mercy to those in need. Moved by deep compassion, he took the initiative to relieve the suffering of others. (Matthew 14:14; 20:30-34) When we imitate Jesus in being merciful, we add meaning to our lives, for those who show mercy to others are happy as a result. (Acts 20:35) We can show mercy to others by our kind words and deeds, bringing relief to those who need our help. Does showing mercy really enhance our well-being?

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE: Maria and her husband, Carlos, are examples of being merciful. Maria’s father is a widower, and in recent years he has become bedridden. Maria and Carlos have taken him into their home and are looking after his every need. They have had many sleepless nights, even rushing him to the hospital when he has a diabetic crisis. They admit that they get really tired at times. But they are happy, just as

* You can read Esa’s story in its entirety on pages 8-9 of this magazine.



Maria and Carlos

Jesus said, because they have the deep satisfaction of knowing that they are providing Maria's father with the care he needs.

PRINCIPLE: "Happy are the peaceable."

—Matthew 5:9.

HOW THE PRINCIPLE CONTRIBUTES TO A MEANINGFUL LIFE: To be "peaceable" literally means to be a "peacemaker." How does being a peacemaker make life more meaningful? For one thing, we enjoy better relationships with those around us. We do well to heed the Bible's advice: "If possible, as far as it depends upon you, be peaceable with all men." (Romans 12:18) "All men" include family members and others who may not share our beliefs. Can being peaceable toward "all men" really add meaning to our life?

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE: Consider the experience of a woman named Nair. Over the years, she has faced many pressures that have tested her ability to maintain peace, especially within her own family. Ever since her husband abandoned her about 15 years ago, she has been bringing up her children on her own. One of her sons had a drug problem and often became uncontrollable and threatened her and her daughter. Nair believes that what she has learned from the Bible has given her the strength to be peaceable, even under such trying circumstances. She tries not to argue or fight about things. She

Nair



endeavors to be kind, sympathetic, and understanding toward others. (Ephesians 4:31, 32) She is convinced that learning to be peaceable has enabled her to have the best possible relationships with family members and others.

TAKING THE FUTURE INTO ACCOUNT

If we follow Jesus' wise advice, we will find happiness and contentment in life. For a truly meaningful life, however, we also need to know what the future holds. After all, how meaningful can life be if all we know is that we will eventually grow old, get sick, and then die? Yet, these are the realities of life in this world.

There is, however, good news! Jehovah has many blessings in store for all those who endeavor to "walk just as Jesus walked." Jehovah promises that he will soon bring about a righteous new world, where faithful humans will live as Jehovah purposed for them to live—forever in perfect health. His Word says: "Look! The tent of God is with mankind, and he will reside with them, and they will be his peoples. And God himself will be with them. And he will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away."—Revelation 21:3, 4.

Maria, the 84-year-old woman mentioned in the first article in this series, rejoices in the prospect of seeing those words come true. What about you? Would you like to know more about "the real life"—the one to come under God's Kingdom? (1 Timothy 6:19) If so, you can ask Jehovah's Witnesses locally or write to the publishers of this magazine.* ■

* The book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses, has helped many to make a topical study of the Scriptures.