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# The Big Questions of Life

## Ignorant of the Laws of Life

Earlier I said that the right to choose for ourselves is an absolutely necessary condition of being human; essentially, it's *the first law of life*. I wonder how many of you knew this law, or could I say, this principle, truth, or fact of life?

The Bible tells us that ignorance is one of our great problems. In fact, this is one reason why people seek help from a therapist. They do not know how to solve their own problems or even make their own decisions.

- My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hos 4:6).
- My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge; And their nobles are famished, And their multitude is parched with thirst (Isa 5:13).
- Being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them (Eph 4:18).
- ❖ I should clarify the difference between *ignorant* and *stupid*, because people often incorrectly say they are dumb in some area when actually they merely lack knowledge about it. Stupid means: slow of mind or understanding; given to unintelligent decisions or acts; acting in an unintelligent or careless manner. Ignorant means: lacking knowledge or comprehension of the thing specified.

Most of us are ignorant of the basic laws of life as well as the moral and spiritual laws. Could this be the reason why we are not experiencing the fullness of life or even the feeling of being alive that we long for?

- ❖ When I use the words “laws of life” you can substitute “established truths,” “governing principles,” or “basic rules,” if you are more comfortable with them.

## ***We live in a world that runs by laws***

Our Creator has made a world that runs by laws—a set of established Truths, a set of governing principles. He does nothing except by His own laws. This is one of the things that He will not do.

God simply will not violate His laws, because they are part of His creation and a direct expression of His divine nature. This is what makes Him so trustworthy. He cannot be manipulated or coerced, like parents often are. His hand moves in direct relationship to His established laws.

Listen to this: In His sovereignty, He has chosen to restrict or limit Himself, so that we might have the power of choice. This so important to our Creator: He did not want to create a bunch of robots, but He wanted people who have a heart and a living soul with the ability to choose for themselves.

↳ *Do you want this power of choice?*

## **Governed by underlying principle**

An underlying principle of God's created order says that "all things must come into balance or equilibrium." The legality of the universe requires that all things come to resolution, balance, i.e., justified. This holds true for natural laws, moral laws, and spiritual laws. There is not one law for the natural realm and another for the spiritual realm.

Here are some natural laws that you are familiar with: the law of gravity; the second law of thermodynamics (law of entropy); the law of aerodynamics.

We see this principle of equilibrium operating in physics and chemistry. The law of physics says, for every action there must be an equal and opposite reaction. Every chemistry equation or formula must balance. All these laws are intended to restore balance in the universe. This also is true for moral and spiritual laws.

## **God's moral laws**

God's moral laws are alive and active in the universe because they are part of nature. We cannot escape them. However, if honored, consciously or unconsciously, they will work to maintain harmony in our lives, restore health and wholeness in us, and release God's blessings to us.<sup>13</sup> These laws have to do with honesty, judging others, forgiving others, honoring our parents, do unto others, giving, etc.

## **God's spiritual laws**

God is a Spirit, and His spiritual kingdom is also highly regulated: the laws of the Spirit govern all that happens in the earth and in the kingdom of God. In the New Testament we read about the law of faith, the law of sin and death, the royal law of love, and the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, among others.

Agnes Sanford<sup>14</sup> says, "We need to understand God's spiritual laws and learn how to adapt ourselves to them, so we can provide the necessary atmosphere for inner peace and answered prayers. We must learn how to use the laws and methods He has given us."

We need a knowledge of the laws of life in order to live and mature – Dr. Paul Tournier.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Adapted from John (1930–2018) & Paula (d. 2012) Sandford, *The Transformation of the Inner Man* (1982).

<sup>14</sup> Agnes Sanford (1897-1982) is known as the mother of the inner healing ministry. In 1947, she published *The Healing Light*, providing us with a practical theology of healing prayer.

<sup>15</sup> Tournier, *The Meaning of Persons* (1956).

↪ *What causes you to lose your sense of balance, equilibrium?*

## **Established truths of life**

In the 1980s, I read Dr. M. Scott Peck's book *The Road Less Traveled*<sup>16</sup> and discovered two great truths of life I was ignorant of. This discovery influenced the course of my life.

### **Life is difficult**

The first truth was that life is difficult! Peck called this a *great truth*, because "once we see it, we can transcend it. Once we truly understand it and accept it – then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters."

However, most people do not know this. Just listen to the people around you, the moaning they do about their problems, burdens, or difficulties, *as if* life should be easy. They feel their difficulties are unique *only* to them and that they should not be having these problems.

Interestingly, this truth is not new. The Teacher told us the same thing many years before. He said that in this life we will experience trials and difficulties, but, He added, "take heart," because we don't need to be troubled by them.

- I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

### **Life is a series of problems**

The second truth was that life is a series of problems! Just because I experience so many problems, challenges, or temptations in life doesn't mean there is something wrong with me. Peck not only normalized this for me, but helped me understand the purpose of all my difficulties.

He explained that the problems of life are the cutting edge that distinguishes between my success or failure. Problems call forth my courage and wisdom; in fact, they even create it. In other words, my problems are the reason that I can grow and develop, mentally and spiritually.

- ❖ At the root of the word *problem* is the idea that problems throw or drive us forward.

Peck notes that we find it easy to avoid our problems because of the emotional suffering in them. He says that this is the primary basis of our emotional and mental disorders. When we don't deal with our problems, we are avoiding the growth that our problems are demanding from us.

This is often why people end up going to a therapist for help. They are suffering from their sense of helplessness; they don't know how to cope or to change things. They feel impotent, because they have, in fact, given their power away (becoming a victim like a

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<sup>16</sup> Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*.

little Orphan Annie), or they are trying to control things (like a superhero) that are not theirs to control.

The work of a therapist is to help them take responsibility for their life, their choices, emotions, and thoughts. When they do, they discover the power of their own choice, and along with it, a growing sense of freedom.<sup>17</sup>

↳ *If you have gone to a therapist, what help did you receive?*

## The Big Question: Is There a God?

I'm sure you have noticed how often I mentioned Our Creator, because many people do not have a relationship with Him. In fact, many Americans are ignorant of their Creator. They may know about Him and agree that He is, but they do not have a personal relationship with Him or have ever experienced Him – which is the basis of making life-giving choices and freedom.

### ***Is God dead?***

A German psychiatrist<sup>18</sup> in the Black Forest found that *if* we do not have a two-way relationship with a loving heavenly Father, we cannot get better. So I want to talk for a moment on the reality of the existence of God, because back in the 1960s, *Time Magazine* promoted a story that raised the question, “Is God dead?” Perhaps this influenced your understanding of knowing a living God. Actually, it frightened me – perhaps He cannot be experienced, I thought.

Recently I read Erick Metaxas'<sup>19</sup> book, *Is Atheism Dead?* in which he details the compelling evidence of God's existence. But I found it most satisfying to read what he said about the 1966 *Time Magazine* cover that had so devastatingly affected me over fifty years ago.

Metaxas explained: “That cover story was essentially the high-water mark for evidence that God had never existed, and as a result of that *cultural moment*, most of us have carried on with that idea ever since. We have likely heard little to disprove it and have mostly assumed the question was settled.”

I don't know how you feel about a Creator God, but I want to ask if you are aware of the astrophysicists who discovered that our universe has a clear beginning? It did not simply evolve as you may have been taught! Listen to this: In 1985, these great scientists concluded that there is no way our universe came into existence apart from some “unfathomable Mind.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, 12.

<sup>18</sup> Psychiatrist Walther Lechler (1923–2013) founded the Bad Herrenalber model and Förderkreis für Holheitsmedizin.

<sup>19</sup> Erick Metaxas (1963– ) is an American Christian author and speaker who hosts a nationally syndicated conservative radio show *The Eric Metaxas Show*.

<sup>20</sup> Erick Metaxas, *Is Atheism Dead?* (Salem Books: Washington, D.C., 2121), 12.

The universe is the creation of some great universal mind underlying and coordinating all minds – Sir James Jeans<sup>21</sup>

↳ *What do you think of what they said? What questions does it raise for you?*

## **Adrift from God**

In spite of this iconoclastic scientific news, we have been living in a culture that has drifted far from the idea of a God. In fact, it seems we gave up God for the idea of “settled science.” We do not believe that there really is a Creator who is alive and wants to relate to us. We’d rather look for life on other planets or aliens than a living God.

So we are living with the ills of a culture who has forgotten God. I won’t name them for you, but just look around at the disintegration of people, families, and our social and moral structures.

We are trying to live our lives in the midst of rapid technological changes; lack of trustworthy moral leaders; barrage of inconsistent worldviews; confusing voices of media; threat of terrorism or war; economic unpredictability; and loss of mates through divorce or death that have left many with the problem of trying to find meaning and purpose for their lives.

Russian historian Alexander Solzhenitsyn<sup>22</sup> said the Russian revolution that swallowed up sixty million people happened simply because “men had forgotten God: that’s why it all happened.”

Although our technological successes have been tremendous, unless we find a living God, we will slowly be destroyed.

We are living in unprecedented, exciting times. But many people don’t know it yet. They are dying of spiritual thirst in the midst of a cultural desert, lost without a sense of stability and meaning in their lives. They need a drink of living water from the One who offered it.

- Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water (John 4:10).

## **Asking questions**

Now I want you to think about questions, specifically your *need* to ask questions.

Perhaps you remember the movie, *Yentil*, when the Rabbi said, “We choose our Yeshiva students by their questions, not only their answers.”

In my experience, asking questions was key in my journey to experiencing more fullness of life.

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<sup>21</sup> Sir James Jeans (1877–1946) was a British physicist, astronomer, and mathematician.

<sup>22</sup> Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008) was a Russian novelist, philosopher, historian, and political prisoner. One of the most famous Soviet dissidents, he was an outspoken critic of communism.

### ↳ *What questions about life do you have?*

“The ancients were afraid that if they went to the end of the earth they would fall off and be consumed by dragons. But once we understand that Christianity is true to what is there, true to the ultimate environment – the infinite, personal God who is really there – then our minds are freed. We can pursue any question and can be sure that we will not fall off the end of the earth.” (Francis Schaeffer)<sup>23</sup>

Having grown up in a secular culture, many of us are ignorant of answers to the Big Questions such as: *Is there a God? Can we experience Him? Will He help us? Who am I? What is the meaning and purpose of my life?*

When one of my younger brothers asked his Sunday School teacher a question, she told him, “Don’t ask questions; just believe it.” So if this happened to you, perhaps you dropped out of church like he did, or you learned to accept what you were told, to quietly practice your religion like I did. But if you are honest, do you lack an inner reality or an authentic experience with your Creator?

Perhaps this explains why at one point in my longing for something more, I made a decision to question everything – if it was true, it would hold up to my questioning. I was not going to be afraid of God. I was hungry and thirsty for the real thing. I wanted reality, nothing less.

The path to holiness lies through questioning everything – M. Scott Peck, M.D.<sup>24</sup>

### ↳ *If you need permission to ask questions, I give it to you now.*

## **Waking up**

I want to help you wake up, to seek for that which is true and real, and to honestly grapple with the Big Questions of life. My hope is for you to become more fully alive, living the life you were created for.

In waking up we look to see how we have been programmed by our heritage, by childhood traumas and blessings, by the media, society, and our culture. The following dream awakened me to look at the influence of my childhood experiences.

### **“The stalking tree” dream**

*I am in the backyard of my childhood home; a large tree with no branches, only the trunk, suddenly walks toward me. It has eyes and is looking at me. I run into the house, trying to get away from it. The*

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<sup>23</sup> Francis Schaeffer, (1912–1984) was one of the foremost evangelical thinkers in the 20th century who was recognized for his work in Christianity and culture. He authored more than twenty books, including *How Shall We Then Live*, *The Rise & Fall of Western Culture*, *The Art & The Bible*, and *He Is There And Is Not Silent*. He and his wife, Edith, founded L’Abri Fellowship where individuals have the opportunity to seek answers to honest questions about God and the significance of human life. Called *L’Abri*, a French word for shelter, because they sought to provide a shelter from the pressures of a relentlessly secular 20th century. They believe true Christian faith will integrate all of human life, including our minds, hearts, work, play, and relationships. Today there are branches of L’Abri on almost every continent (including one in the village we lived in, Southborough, Massachusetts, back in the late 1970s, when we had the opportunity to visit it).

<sup>24</sup> M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (1985 edition), 7.

*tree follows me inside. I am terrified. I run out the door and down the sidewalk trying to escape from it. As I run, I become an “inch worm” crawling along the sidewalk.*

A childhood home in our dreams usually depicts the part of our personality and character which developed in that environment or things we experienced during the time we lived there.

Since I had lived in that house until I was 11 years old, the house symbolized what I had learned or experienced during those particular years. The tree symbolized my family tree; the inch worm, my bound and earthly condition.

The message of my dream was clear. It was time to face my family history and experiences I'd made there if I wanted to become fully alive and free. If not, I would forever be bound to just crawling along in life.

The Teacher taught that whatever was hidden must come into the light. So it was time for me to awaken, stop running from the past, and face it.

- For nothing is hidden that shall not become evident, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light (Luke 8:17).

If we want to become fully alive, we need to look honestly at our past, make peace with it, decide what we really want in life, see the truth about where we are now, and learn to make life-giving choices. We must understand how to develop a relationship with our Creator, how to eat from the tree of life, and discover how to flow with the river of life.

By now you know I often share quotes from the people who I read and learned from that capture the essence of the truths I want you to see. And it seems we often need to hear something from the mouth of two or three people before we are able to really accept it. So I encourage you to take time to learn a bit about the authors of the quotes.

Dr. David Benner<sup>25</sup> said in his book on *Spirituality and the Awakening Self* that “most of us go through life as sleepwalkers, a sleep of self-preoccupied oblivion and of a mindless robot shuffling through a fog. This is why teachers have always taught the importance of awareness into a deeper consciousness of our being in God. The self that emerges during this journey is larger, more enlightened, and more whole.” He says all humans are invited to make a journey toward our source and toward our fulfillment.

Here are Sacred Texts calling us to awaken:

- Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago (Isa 51:9).
- And this do, knowing the time, that now it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep (Rom 13:11).
- For this reason it says, “Awake sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine on you” (Eph 5:14).

↳ ***Do you think you need to wake up?***

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<sup>25</sup> Dr. David Benner (1947- ) is an internationally known psychologist, a spiritual guide, and a transformation coach who has authored more than twenty books, including *Care of Souls* (1998) and *Spirituality and the Awakening Self* (2012), 15.

## My Story

In my journey, I discovered we are much bigger than we realize; there are deeper layers within us, like an iceberg residing below consciousness. There I found my true self, my identity and purpose for life. However, many people do not want to ask the hard questions, to make this journey of discovery. Looking back over my life, I can see that I was on a search for a living God since I was a small child.

### My early questions

I remember a conversation that took place when I was in my late twenties while sitting around a campfire with friends. I was all stirred up because of a book I had recently read entitled *Tell No Man* (1967).<sup>26</sup>

It was a moving story of a wealthy executive who experienced a religious conversion and found himself called to follow in the steps of Christ and do what He did. As a result, healings and miracles began to happen. I wondered aloud to my friends if this could perhaps happen today.

I also questioned the words of the Teacher when He said, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father”* (John 14:12). Can this really be true? If so, then why don’t I ever see these things happening in my church, I asked my friends.

This campfire conversation came on the heels of an earthshattering experience. In 1966, a *Time Magazine* issue appeared with the infamous title, “Is God Dead?” When I saw it, my heart dropped. Ever since my youth, I had hoped that someday I would come to know a God who was not silent.

### My world falls apart

I never found my own answers to the Big Questions of life until our seven-year old became ill with leukemia. This crisis propelled me into a search for a living God with everything in me. I knew there was no way I’d survive the loss of my child unless I could find a God who was not voiceless, but One who would make His presence known to me.

With the pediatrician’s diagnosis an explosion took place in my life, an explosion of a myth: boy meets girl, children follow, and they live happily ever after. All my fantasies about life were shattered. In the wake of this devastating news, my life was thrown into personal chaos.

I now faced the greatest challenges of my entire life: how to live and survive the life-threatening illness of my child. How do I make sense out of suffering and loss? How can I grapple with one of the great human issues of life: death itself?

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<sup>26</sup> Adele Rogers St. Johns (1894-1988), an American journalist, screenwriter, and author whose long career followed a variety of topics from sports, politics, and the movies. Her best-selling books included *Tell No Man* (1967) and *Final Verdict* (1962).



We were active church members. I had gone to Bible studies, served on church committees, and really, to all appearances, I was a very good Christian. But inside I knew that I didn't really know God.

It felt like the bottom of my life had just dropped out, but actually, it had just begun. Up until then, I'd kept saying, "Someday I am going to get to know God. Someday I am really going to get to know Him." Now was the time.

### **It took a crisis**

I found that nothing in my life had prepared me psychologically or spiritually for handling such a catastrophe – not my nursing school, not the church, and not the educational systems of society. These institutions failed to teach me how to cope with pain, suffering, loss, and death.

For years, the fear of losing a child had tormented me; now I must face my fears. And there were no textbooks or manuals to help me. Only God could – if I could find Him.

### **My quest begins**

This pressure became the catalyst for an intense spiritual search, a search that was to lead me outside of my narrow and rigid confines – to a profound encounter with a living God.

For all my years of church going, my childhood years of memorizing Scriptures, doing what my church said, I still did not know how to find God – or if He was even knowable today.

We have to seek God in order to find Him – Dr. Richard Peace <sup>27</sup>

Over the years I'd listened to many pastors and biblical scholars debate and discuss the validity of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit as they seemed to denigrate the possibility of experiencing the supernatural presence of God.

I frequently heard things like: *God doesn't do that anymore; that was only for their time. He doesn't need to do miracles, cast out demons, or heal the sick. That time is over with. And those apostles, prophets, and workers of miracles – well, we don't need them either. They are not for us. We have something better: we have the Book that tells us how it used to be.*

But one day, I noticed a couple in our Sunday School class who acted as if they really believed God heard them when they prayed. They shared reports of answered prayers and physical healings.

Intrigued by their expectancy in God, I asked the woman to visit me in my house. I wanted to hear more. I wanted to know God like she did. The day she came changed my life forever. I too began to experience a living God!

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<sup>27</sup> Dr. Richard Peace (1933–), an author and theologian, was a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary whose specialty was spiritual formation. He published *Pilgrimage: A Handbook on Christian Growth* (1976) and numerous other books.

## Reflection Points

- ◆ Why does Our Creator give us the power of choice?
- ◆ How do you think our universe began?
- ◆ What laws of life or truths are identified in this chapter?
- ◆ Why do you think it often takes a crisis to seek for God and spiritual reality?
- ◆ Do you feel you are currently in a crisis?
- ◆ Meditate on the words of the Teacher: *Jesus stood up and cried out saying, “If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me as the Scripture said, ‘From His innermost being shall flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37-38).*

## Your Response

- ⇒ Log any insights or understandings you have received thus far.
- ⇒ What are the key words/phrases in this chapter?
- ⇒ Have you experienced a crisis in your life? How did you handle it?
- ⇒ Have you experienced God in your life? If yes, try to write in your journal about some of the ways you have experienced Him.
- ⇒ In your journal, write out any Big Questions you have about life and God.
- ⇒ Many people have a belief in God. If you also have a belief in God, would you draw a picture or paint what God means to you?