

The Meaning of Life

**A Reflection Paper
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Phoenix Seminary
Scottsdale, Arizona**

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**by
Troy A. Griffitts
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When we think about “The Meaning of Life”, all kinds of ideas come to mind, and vary greatly from individual to individual. This seems to be due to the loosely defined words in our subject. For most who would call themselves thoughtful Christian servants, definitions are likely more similar, but even then, we find broad definitions. Since this paper will be written from this perspective, we will begin narrowing our terms here. 'Life' will be defined as this short time of existence on earth in which eternal destinies can still be determined. 'Meaning' will be limited very specifically to 'God's purpose for man', and since 'The' seems to narrow our subject down to a single 'Meaning', and since God likely has multiple purposes for man during this lifetime, we will set our sites on God's 'highest' purpose. So, to pull things together, we will seek to discuss, “God's highest purpose for mankind during this short time of existence on earth in which eternal destinies can still be determined.”

Recently, I received an email with a tagline that read:

“The climax of God's happiness is the delight He takes in the echoes of His excellence in the praises of His people.” ~ John Piper

Although a clever quip, I began to wonder, “Is that even close to being Biblical?” Since our purpose is to discover “God's highest purpose...” it would seem that a Biblical examination of such a statement about “The climax of God's happiness...” might lend itself to our topic.

For something to be a candidate for “the climax” of God's happiness, by definition of “climax” it must be the highest happiness of God which we've been told in Scripture. Nothing can be

said to make God happier, in comparison. If a thorough evaluation of Scripture shows that nothing makes God happier, even then, we have just qualified our statement as a mere candidate for the climax of God's happiness. Unless Scripture tells us explicitly that nothing else makes God happier, then we cannot assert that we have discovered anything more than "the highest happiness of God about which Scripture speaks."

Let's begin with our first evaluation objective. Is anything in Scripture said to make God happier than the "echoes of His excellence in the praises of His people"? Three stories come to mind and comprise all of Chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke. Verses 8-10 tell the story of a woman who has 10 silver coins, about which presumably she is happy. She then discovers that one of her coins has become lost. After lighting a lamp and sweeping carefully, she finally finds her lost coin, calls her neighbors and friends together to rejoice with her over her lost coin which she has found. Though she was happy about her 10 safe coins, this level of rejoicing did not take place, save over the reclamation of the single lost coin. The lesson is explicit in the final verse:

"In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:10)

The longest of the three stories depicts a father and two sons. One son is rebellious, takes his portions of the household worth, runs off to a far land, and squanders the equity with loose living. Eventually, he returns to his father in repentance and the father's response is one of great celebration.

"22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a

ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate." (Luke 15:22-24)

The final story to examine actually begins the chapter and is the first of the three stories. The occasion for Christ's teaching introduces the Chapter. Pharisees and religious leaders of the time were looking down on Jesus because He was receiving and eating with sinners. These three stories are Jesus' correction of their hearts which neglected to do the same. This first story is more of an illustration directed to Christ's accusers. He begins by asking them,

4 "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'"

This story again stresses the great rejoicing over finding that which was lost. The next verse again repeats the moral of the lesson:

"7 I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Here lies the interesting fact which pertains to our evaluations. We're told that there is "more joy," a comparative statement. And what is being compared? The salvation of a single soul over ninety-nine righteous souls who need no repentance—presumably praising God and doing other things we, as faithful servants ought to do. The Bible clearly says that "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance"; therefore, we can conclude that the "climax of God's happiness" cannot be from the ninety-nine righteous.

Now, I'm not suggesting God isn't happy when we praise His excellence. Merely that He is more happy when a sinner repents. When I first read our tagline subject, I suppose it was the claim to the 'climax of God's happiness' that disturbed me. This axiom seems to derive that God's primary and highest focus is His glory, when God clearly tells us His heart has a higher priority: to sacrifice His glory, become a Man, humble Himself to the point of an unglorious death on a cross, all to come and find me, a sinner and His enemy (Philippians 2; Romans 5).

Here is a comparison, which may be inadequate but might prove a useful illustration. Image a marriage relationship. How might the wife in this relationship feel toward her husband if he said that:

1) The CLIMAX of his happiness is when his wife fully appreciates his glory.

Not a bad thing. How about this:

2) The CLIMAX of his happiness is knowing some sacrifice of his glory has met the needs of his wife.

Which reflects a better character of the husband?

Christ came to demonstrate His love for us in that while we were His enemy, Christ died for us to meet our need. This was Christ's Own purpose during His short time of existence on earth. He picked up His Cross to bring salvation to a lost world. If indeed Christ is to be our example, ought we not to pick up our cross and follow Him?

I believe God's highest purpose for mankind during this short time of existence on earth in which eternal destinies can still be determined is to reflect God's Character to a lost world in such a way they understand His Great Love which He went to great humbling lengths to demonstrate for them. God tells us that it is His kindness that brings a lost world to repentance (Roman 2:4). Christ's greatest gift of kindness to show His Great Love was to humble himself and die for a lost world, and He confirms His intension for this act of humility to draw a lost world to Himself (John 12:32-33). Considering the marriage illustration above, I find the best way to accomplish this purpose is to convey clear Biblical teaching of the heart of God to a lost world, over cute quips which teach the very antithesis of God's Character to a world which needs a sacrifice of glory.