

Father God Invisible • 1 Timothy 1:17

What is the goal of life?

Goals are important. Perhaps you have heard the saying, “If you aim at nothing you will hit it every time.” But, if the goal is money, success or good looks, we all know that they run out at death. Dying people seldom discuss investments, worry about promotions or comb their hair for their last breath.

Serious thinking about the goal of life has left many people frustrated if not desperate. Millions avoid the question because they have no answer. They live life only for today even if it means facing hell tomorrow. Some sad philosophers have concluded that the goal of life is death. According to them, we begin dying the moment we are born. Death is what life is all about. The end of everything is nothing.

Christians have a completely different answer. With a confidence that is unsettling to others we say that the goal of life is God. Our reason for living is God. Our destination is God. The meaning of life is found in God. God is the goal from childhood to old age, through good times and bad, for today, tomorrow and forever.

We are convinced that if we know God everything else in life has meaning and fits together. If we do not know God everything else in life is a frustrating, meaningless struggle.

It was with the goal of God that the first century Christians adopted an ancient Jewish benediction that was written into the New Testament in I Timothy 1:17: “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

When Christians repeat these high and holy words we are referring to God the Father. We speak of him as the First Person of the Trinity.

The doctrine of the trinity is central to historic orthodox Christianity. It is one of the primary distinguishing differences between Christianity and cults and between Christianity and other world religions. Yet the word “Trinity” never once ap-

pears in the Bible. It is not a Bible word but a term to describe and understand the Bible’s teaching about God.

The Bible speaks of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Bible clearly teaches that they are absolutely distinct persons, that each is fully God and that there is only one God.

To some that is nonsense. How can God be one and three at the same time?

To Christians it is a wonderful supernatural mystery. The very fact that God doesn’t fit into our reason demonstrates that he is God. God is God. He is different from us and from everyone else. God is one of a kind. God is three and one at the same time.

We admit that we can’t fully understand God. Our best word for describing his marvelous mystery is our word “Trinity” - - - one God in the three persons of Father, Son and Spirit.

The First Person of the Trinity is God the Father. He is the one who most of us first think of when we use the word “God”. He is not more God than the Son or the Spirit. He is not older or bigger or better. He us just the one most of us think of first.

Now . . . to God the Father . . . “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

When God the Father is called “King” modern Americans are slow to understand. We have very little experience with kings. Our idea of a national leader is a president whom we elect, serves a maximum of eight years, suffers frequent criticisms and usually has trouble implementing his plans. The little experience we have with royalty is limited to places like Great Britain, Japan or Sweden where the monarchs are mostly ceremonial and symbolic.

When the Bible uses “King” it is in the sense of absolute ruler and owner of everything. Most kings throughout

history have claimed absolute power over people and property. It is the power of life and death. Whatever the king says is the law and must be

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obeyed. The people are not called “citizens” but “subjects” - - - those who are subject to whatever the king desires.

God the Father is THE King. He created the world. He owns the earth and everything on it. We did not elect him. We have no vote. We are his subjects. Anyone who does not fully submit to his authority is guilty of treason and will suffer the consequences of that guilt.

The good news is that God the Father is a good king. Not that we could do anything about it if he were an evil king! He is the king no matter what. But the truth is that he is a kind, just and loving ruler who has the best interests of his people at heart.

Revelation 15:3-4 says:

“Great and marvelous are your deeds,
Lord God Almighty.

Just and true are your ways, King of
the ages.

Who will not fear you, O Lord, and
bring glory to your name?

For you alone are holy.

All nations will come and worship be-
fore you,
for your righteous acts have been re-
vealed.”

The only way that we will have meaning, purpose, happiness or fulfillment in this life is to submit to God the Father as the King. Everything must be on his terms, not our terms. It is absolute nonsense when people say, “Well, if that’s the way God is then I don’t want anything to do with him. I’m going to do things my way and if God doesn’t like that, I guess it’s his problem.” Do those who say such things have any idea that they are talking about the King?

In 1988, Charleen, our daughter Jill and I were traveling by train from Vienna, Austria, to Krakow, Poland, through what was then Czechoslovakia. The train was stopped midway through Czechoslovakia by armed soldiers who boarded the train and began a thorough search, opening the ventilation ducts and searching them as well as running mirrors under all of the train cars. Then they began to check the papers of every passenger. When they got to us they looked at our passports and, through a translator, asked to see our transit visas. I’d never heard the word before and had no idea what they were or that we needed

transit visas. We explained that we didn’t have them. We asked what we had to do. Finally, after a very long time, we were offered two choices: give this soldier all the money that we had or get off the train. We were in the middle of a Communist country in an area surrounded by barbed wire and floodlights in the middle of the night. We didn’t speak the language. We didn’t know anybody. We did not have visas. Getting off the train did not seem like a good option.

What would you do? Argue? Plead ignorance? Demand your rights? Fight? They had all the power. We had none.

We did exactly what you probably would have done. We gave them all our money - - - and we did it gladly!

Now please forgive me for comparing Czechoslovakian Communists to God the King. The point of the comparison is that in our lives and in our world God is the King. He sets the rules. He calls the shots. He gives the orders. God and God alone defines what is right and what is wrong. God sets the terms of salvation and eternal life. He is God. He is King.

What do you think we should do? You are right. We should do whatever he says!

Being king is not a new job for God. He is “the King eternal”. God has always been the King. Always! Eternal! Which, of course, means that God never began and God will never end.

That’s another difficult concept for us to understand because we don’t live like that. Everything we do has a beginning and an ending. We are born and we die. We start jobs and we quit jobs. We depart on trips and we arrive at our destinations.

To us “old” is ten years if we’re talking about a car or a dog. “Old” is 100 if we’re referring to another person or an antique. “Old” is 200 when speaking of a country or a tree.

We have no category for anyone to have been old a trillion years ago. And we have no way of imagining anyone that will still be the king a billion years from now and just be getting started.

Astrophysicists and ordinary people talk about when the universe began. There is the theory of a Big Bang millions of years ago. But what was before the Big Bang? Obviously there was something there to bang into. And go back forever and ever and ever before any beginning you can

imagine.

Or, go the other direction. Whether you think the earth will last a thousand years or a trillion years, what about after that? If it is true that the universe is running down, what happens after it stops . . . forever and ever into the future? It's enough to give a person a headache just trying to imagine eternity.

Long before and long after any of us can imagine, God was and God will be there. God the Father is "the King eternal."

When a person becomes a Christian, the Bible says that God gives that person "eternal life." That means more than lasting forever. It means that we share eternity with God. We will share forever with God.

God the Father is the King eternal and immortal. That means that GOD does not die. But it also means that God does not deteriorate.

All of us are mortal. That means that we do die. It also means that we deteriorate.

Except for the very youngest among us, we all know what deterioration means. As time passes we start to wear out. Once you are past 14 you lose your ability to learn a foreign language with the same proficiency as a native speaker. No matter how hard you study you will never be as good as the kid who grew up speaking that language. Once you pass other numbers you lose your ability to have a baby, to climb a mountain, to remember names, to run a race.

For most of our lives we struggle against our mortality. We are immunized against childhood disease; we exercise; we take vitamins; and we go to doctors and hospitals. We do whatever we can to deal with our mortality, and without exception everyone of us deteriorates and dies anyway.

God the Father is forever young. He is immortal. He does not deteriorate. He doesn't forget. He never loses his edge. He never wears down. He never changes.

He is the King eternal, immortal . . . and invisible.

God the Father is a spirit. He has no body to see. He is invisible. That's why John 1:18 says, "No one has ever seen God."

This is one aspect of God that modern Ameri-

cans probably can understand better than some other people can. We are fully aware that there is no direct connection between what we can see and what is real. We cannot see radio and television waves, but we know that a room can be full of them and that they are real even if they are invisible. We live with full acceptance of the reality of viruses, atoms, distant celestial bodies and internal human emotions that are invisible to our eyes but powerfully real in our everyday lives.

There are three prerequisites to being a person: intellect, emotion and will. Personhood does not require a body.

Many times I have stood by the casket of someone who recently has died and heard loving relatives say, "He's not in there any more." What they are declaring is that the person continues to exist as a person (with intellect, emotion and will) but has been separated from the physical body. That person is still real but is now invisible.

God the Father does not have a physical body. You cannot see him. You will not see him. No one has ever seen him.

Early in the 20th century there was a famous preacher in New York City named Harry Emerson Fosdick. He was famous for many reasons including that he was one of the first national speakers on radio and he was the pastor to the wealthy Rockefeller family.

Fosdick once preached a sermon entitled "Why I am a Theist" in which he told about his changed perspective from childhood to adulthood. He said that when he was a child he became convinced that the movement of the branches and leaves on trees caused the wind to blow. But when he became an adult he came to realize that the wind he could not see moved the branches and leaves that he could see. He went on to explain that it is a childish notion that the circumstances

of life explain God. It is an adult faith that understands that the invisible God is the cause for the visible world.

The great explanation for our visible world and everything that happens in it is "the King eternal, immortal, invisible . . . the only God."

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God the Father is one of a kind. Contrary to the teachings and beliefs of many other religions, Christians are monotheists. We believe in only one God.

In this we are not alone. This belief is shared by the three great world monotheistic religions of the world - - - Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Of course, all three have in common the revelations of God in the Old Testament scriptures.

Deuteronomy 6:4 tells us that “the LORD our God, the LORD is one.”

Never think that God the Father is the good god and Satan is the bad god. There is only one God. And do not think that each religion has its own deity. There is not one god for each country. God does not have cousins or competitors. There is only one God.

The practical power of the oneness of God is that we have only one choice. The choice is to acknowledge and live for him or to reject him. If we reject him and choose to live for ourselves we are setting ourselves up as God. If we act as if money or house or business or boyfriend is most important in our lives, we have created what the Bible calls “false gods” and the Ten Commandments very explicitly teach:

“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make yourselves an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God.” (Exodus 20:4-5)

Another way of saying it is that God has a monopoly on being God. A monopoly means complete control. There is no other choice. There is no one else to whom we can turn. “Mono” means “one”. There is only one God.

When the first century Christians met together to worship God the Father they often included the words of I Timothy 1:17. A leader would stand up front and would say: “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be glory for ever and ever.” And then the assembled worshippers would respond with a loud and clear “Amen!” as an expression of wholehearted agreement.

This was a benediction to take with them, as well as an affirmation of their agreement. May this be our benediction as we conclude our study of the First Person of the Trinity, and may we carry with us, as well, the affirmation of who he is as we step back into the activities of our daily lives.

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