“Should I Be Alarmed by the Concept of Christian Hedonism?”

I am alarmed to hear about a concept called “Christian hedonism,” which my wife encountered in a Beth Moore study. As we were beating this around, I checked on the web and found that there were some philosophers, like Erasmus and Thomas More, who attempted to syncretize religion and hedonism together. But I see a difficulty with this just like I see a difficulty with the term “Christian existentialism.”

The first time you come across the term “Christian Hedonism,” it really does make you scratch your head, if not blanch. I understand! But other writers are developing this idea, which actually makes a lot of sense when you get into it. John Piper’s book *Desiring God* is about enjoying God. Here’s a great explanation on that: http://www.desiringgod.org/library/what_we_believe/christian_hedonism.html

Actually, I think it’s a great concept because we evangelicals need to connect our heads with our hearts. For too long, Christianity has been nothing but an intellectual exercise, with our hearts going untouched and, in many cases, unchanged. What a travesty! When we get caught up in God’s “wonderfulness,” there is a whole new motivation to cooperate in His transformation of our lives and hearts; we can eagerly open ourselves to Him out of love instead of sterile duty.

So, bottom line—I think Christian hedonism is a great concept, and I hope it becomes increasingly contagious! <smile>

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin

“I Need Help Figuring Out the Meaning of MY Life”

Jerry Solomon,

I read your essay entitled, “What’s the Meaning of Life?” and was encouraged. I see that you wrote the piece over five years ago; but of course the content is ageless.

If you have a few minutes, I’d like to share my story with you and perhaps solicit some advice from you.

I’m 43. I became a believer when I was 8. I’ve walked closely with Jesus for most of those years. I have a wife of 22 years and three fantastic teenage children. Vocationally, I’ve been [details edited out]. In addition to many other blessings, God has blessed us financially—so much so that the financial need to work has diminished, leaving me time (and emptiness) to consider “meaning” questions.

I ask God, “What’s next?” but I don’t seem to be getting throughor at least I don’t understand His answer(s). Most men (including my believing dad) are very uncomfortable talking to me about “meaning” questions. I sense that it’s scary for them to face such crucial issues head on. I’ve read *Purpose Driven Life* and am re-reading Piper’s *Desiring God*. *Purpose Driven Life* was good; but it didn’t offer me any new perspectives. Piper’s book is challenging; but I’m not sure how to “activate” the whole idea of “enjoying God.”

I’m taking a month off work to try to figure out what happens next. I would be honored if you would take time to comment or

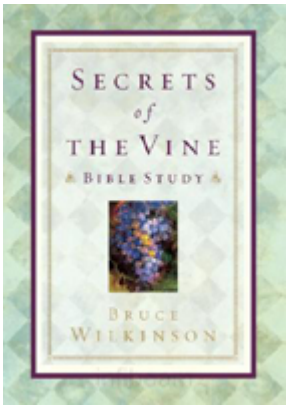
share spiritual insights you (or your staff) might have.

Dear _____,

Thank you for your comments and expression of gratitude upon reading Jerry's article. In a following paragraph to his article we explain that Jerry is no longer with Probe and that within 2 years of leaving Probe for an associate pastor's role in a local church, the Lord took him home after a 6 month battle with pancreatic cancer. I will respond to your query as best I can.

You are correct in your observation that many men are uncomfortable considering questions of meaning. Basically they are afraid of what they might discover and that their life has been focused on the wrong things. Who wants to discover that?! This is especially so for someone like your dad who is late in life with little time to correct his perspective.

You are also correct in your intuition that discovering life's meaning for you has to go beyond reading a book. *Purpose Driven Life* is great for those who have never even considered these things. But for those who have followed Him with some perseverance over many years will find the book a little stale and repetitive. It really is for baby Christians.



I would like to suggest a different book you can read in an hour or so but the application at the end could last several years. The book is Bruce Wilkinson's *Secrets of the Vine*. It's an exposition of John 15 that outlines four stages to a believers life: (1) little fruit, (2) no fruit due to discipline brought on by sin, (3) pruning to produce more fruit, and (4) full abiding. My suspicion is that you are desiring a fully abiding relationship with your Lord, and Wilkinson's description of his own crisis and his solution will be enlightening and empowering to you.

Unfortunately, in my experience, few Christians get to the place where full abiding is where they want to be. It scares them. It is a full relinquishing of ourselves to Him and Him alone. Abiding truly is just being with Him and not necessarily looking for more ways to serve, more things to accomplish. Abiding is getting to the point where we realize that if we simply pursue Jesus, all He wants from us will flow with almost no effort because we are yielded to Him.

This requires a sharpened sense of knowing His will. To do that one needs to spend time with Him, truly know Him. Wilkinson embarked on a journey of journaling his thoughts with the Lord. I am working on developing that skill. It's not easy for me, having grown up with a loving but non-communicative father. I'm still learning how to talk to my heavenly Father as a person and not some kind of heavenly czar.

I have led several groups of men through this book, and some get it and get it big. Most, however, are intrigued, enlightened, but non-committal.

Quite simply, yet frustratingly, the meaning of life is Jesus. "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Ultimately, knowing Him and pursuing Him is the only thing that can bring true meaning, fulfillment, and joy in this life, no matter what we actually do, day in and day out.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, PhD

Thank you very much for your very thoughtful response. I was very encouraged by your comments and felt like you really understand the struggle. Wow, what a breath of fresh air, that another brother understands. I look forward to getting and reading Bruce Wilkinson's *Secrets of the Vine*. Thank you for taking the time to respond.

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