



discover tomorrow

*Uncover the story told through current world events
that gives hope to a world in crisis*

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Seem like we're just set here, a woman said to me recently, *and don't nobody know why*.

However ineloquently expressed, the woman's words say so much. None of us asked to be born. Each of us were, as she said, *just set down here*, and who hasn't at times wondered why, especially when life gets hard?

ALL THIS WAY—AND TO WHAT PURPOSE?

Writing 2,400 years ago about the human condition, an ancient Greek said that the best thing for any of us was *never to have been born*. In the past century, author Albert Camus wrote, *There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide*.

Suicide?

Yes, because the real question in the face of so much tragedy, he said, is judging whether or not life is even worth living.

I cried when I was born, wrote poet George Herbert, *and every day shows why*.

A young man, just married, had survived the atomic blast over Hiroshima in 1945. His new wife, however, was obliterated. Nothing remained but charred bones. Desperate, he gathered the remains, put them in a small bowl, and managed amid the chaos to get on a train to another city where her parents lived. He wanted to give them the bones, something to remember her by.

The only problem? The city he went to was Nagasaki, where a few days later the second bomb exploded. The young man survived that bombing

as well, but the blast threw open the top of the bowl that contained her bones, and scattered them into oblivion.

Stunned, weeping, the young man cried out, *All this way! All this way, and her bones are scattered who knows where - and to what purpose?*

THE HARD QUESTIONS

And to what purpose?

We hustle, we struggle, we suffer, we go *all this way*, and then, after that - we die anyway. It seems too hard to make sense of it all. No wonder we wrestle with hard questions that cry out for answers that don't always come.

Why do we exist? What are our origins? What can we hope for? What is *this* we have found ourselves in? Where is it heading? What is the purpose of our lives now that we are, and not of our own choosing, *set down here*? Why so much pain and suffering? What can it all mean when death has the final word anyway?

The wise man Solomon, one of the Bible writers, agrees.



***Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done
And on the labor in which I had toiled;
And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind.
There was no profit under the sun.***

Ecclesiastes 2:11

King Solomon had everything - money, glory, women, power, fame, brilliance - that this world could offer - and then some. He had accomplished more than most humans ever would, even if they had five

lifetimes. And yet, as he came to the end of his days, he deemed it all meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Thus, the dilemma: We are beings who cry out for answers in a world that doesn't yield them easily to us.

SEAWATER SYRINGES

That's why, from the earliest days of recorded human history, humans have struggled with the reason for their existence, especially with the important question of origins. After all, how can we know how to live if we don't know the purpose of our life to begin with, and how can we know the purpose if we don't know how we got here?

Imagine if a shipment of medicines - say antibiotics - were to wash up on the shore of an island filled with pre-civilisation people who had no contact with the outside world. The curious islanders open the box and find all sorts of pills and liquids and strange little cylinders with sharp points. They might shake the pill bottles in order to make music in their dance rituals. They might use the liquid medicine as make-up. They might find the syringes useful for squirting seawater at each other for the fun of it. The point is, without knowing the origins of the medical supplies, without knowing why they were created, and what their purpose was - the islanders would miss out on the real benefits they could have.

How much more so with our lives? We have bodies, minds, imagination, drive, reason, passion, and spirit - all the things that make us what we are. And yet if we don't know what our purpose is, why we are here, how we are to live - won't we, of necessity, miss out on so much?

THE FITTEST

Thus, we have always told stories about our origins. The ancients believed in various creation stories, such as one about two battling gods in which the defeated one's body is split in two, half to create the heaven, half to create the earth. Today, we have our own stories. Many people, for instance, think that humans are the products of pure chance, and that our universe is just one of those things that happen from time to time. Francis Crick, one of the greatest scientists of the 20th century, believed that space aliens from another planet seeded life on earth, and that's how we got here. Indigenous Australian culture sees their origins in the dream-time stories.

Some speculate that nothing created the universe. *It seems impossible that you could get something from nothing, one author wrote, but the fact that once there was nothing but now there is a universe is evident proof that you can.*

Whatever one believes about origins, the concept remains important. Our conception of our past can greatly influence how we view the present. For most of human history, humans believed that we, in one way or another, came from God or gods; but today many from developed cultures believe we came from apes instead.

This shift isn't without consequences either. Darwinian evolution, for instance, teaches that humans are evolving from lower life forms. Consistent with this, the idea developed that certain people groups aren't fully evolved and thus not fully human. Some have argued that these inferior groups shouldn't be accorded all the rights and privileges of full

humans. Charles Darwin agreed that Australian Aborigines should be killed because they were sub-human.

A group of tourists in the 1990's were visiting the Nazi concentration camp of Dachau in Germany. A young German guide began the tour by talking about the theory of evolution, and he established a direct link between it and the Holocaust. *The whole idea behind evolution, he said, the idea of the survival of the fittest, helped pave the way for the attempted extermination of people who weren't deemed the fittest.*

A DIFFERENT STORY

In contrast to space aliens, or nothing, or evolving apes, the Bible gives a totally different picture of how it all started. We exist, the Bible teaches, because God took the initiative.



In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

For centuries, students of the Bible have commented on the matter-of-factness of this opening line. There are no involved and intricate attempts at logic to prove God's existence. There's no proofs offered that He created the *heavens and the earth*. It's just stated as fact, period.

No doubt, the Bible teaching of God as our Creator makes a lot of sense, especially in contrast to the ancient notion of the earth being created by the body of a squashed god, or the modern notion that it was created by nothing.

Even more so, the Bible teaches something that, if taken seriously, helps each of us understand our incredible worth.



So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:27

What a stark contrast between evolution in which we exist only by chance, and the Bible account which teaches that we were not only purposefully created by God, but created in His image as well. It's a picture that places all human beings on an equal footing no matter what our ethnicity, gender, colour or creed.

Even so, the world God created that was *very good* is far from that today. What went wrong? The natural world today tells two stories - one of love, care and protection, and the other of predatory cruelty and death.

THE PROMISE OF A BETTER FUTURE

Yet, even with belief in God as our Creator, many questions and concerns remain. And one of the biggest is: How do we make sense of our own lives, our own place in this world, especially with all the pain and suffering and tragedy that's such a part of all our stories?

Interestingly enough, despite all the questions and all the suffering, the Bible gives us reasons not to despair. It offers hope and encourages trust. It looks beyond what we see today, and points us time and again to an amazing future.



For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.

Isaiah 65:17



And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

Revelation 21:3-4

These are just two of many wonderful promises about what the ultimate future holds, a future offered to all who will accept it.

SIGNS

Unfortunately, until then, we all struggle in a world gone crazy. Yet it's precisely the kind of world that God has predicted we'd be living in. The Bible has warned us that our world would be as we see it today. In fact, God has given us signs, warnings even, about what to expect.

What are some of these signs, and what are we to make of them?

WARS AND RUMOURS OF WAR

For decades leading up to the 20th century, people really believed the world was going to get better, and that human beings, as they increased in knowledge, would get better and better as well. Many also thought that, as we came to the 20th century, we were entering an era where war would cease.

But, in contrast, almost two thousand years ago, Jesus Himself told us a story about the end times in which we live. He said:



For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...

Mark 13:8

And this:



And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

Matthew 24:6

Who was right? What does our world look like today? The optimism of the early 20th century, or the picture that Jesus painted?

Within the second decade of the 20th century, World War I started. It was soon followed by World War II, and between those two and after there have been ceaseless wars, many going on right now.

Who is right?

EXPLOSION OF KNOWLEDGE

About 2,600 hundred years ago, the prophet Daniel, in the Old Testament, wrote about our times:



But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.

Daniel 12:4

Knowledge shall increase? While it is true that there is a vast increase in knowledge generally today, this prediction relates to the increase in knowledge of the prophecies of the book of Daniel - prophecies that were *shut up and seal[ed] until the time of the end*. Daniel 12:4 This series will explore those prophecies that God has now opened for us.

And communication? In seconds we can communicate to almost any point in the world, something unheard of even 150 years ago, much less in the times of the Bible. All of this becomes important in light of these words by Jesus:



And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Matthew 24:14

The idea of spreading the gospel to the entire world, in a day and age of instant communication, is so much more likely now than when Jesus first spoke it almost 2,000 years ago. Today, for example, *Hope* satellite TV broadcasts the gospel to every corner of the globe.

RICH VERSUS POOR

One of the great curses facing humanity is the continued vast gap between the rich and the poor. Even with globalization, and an incredible amount of trade between nations, the cries of the poor - especially of those being exploited - echo across the planet.

All the while, the rich remain richer than ever. In Tokyo, for instance, the rich can indulge themselves in a \$17,000 martini at the Ritz Carlton. Yes - \$17,000 for one drink - the cost comes from a diamond found at the bottom of the glass!

Meanwhile, billions around the world drink water downstream that others defecate in upstream. And God alone knows how much blood, sweat, and tears were spilled by those digging that diamond out of the ground for subsistence wages!

No wonder the Bible says of today:



Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.

James 5:1-5

These ancient words speak powerfully in an era of sweatshops and child labour. No, child labour has not ended. Some estimate that about 158 million children between the ages of five and fourteen are forced into work worldwide. Today billions live on less than \$2.50 per day.

When Jesus said, *The poor you will always have with you*, (Matthew 26:11), He certainly wasn't exaggerating.

FAMINES AND PESTILENCE

One of the increasing struggles the planet also faces - another sign - deals with the problems caused by overpopulation. It has helped lead to famine, poverty, and hunger - all the kinds of things that people have been trying to stop, and have failed to do so, since the beginning of time.

Today, millions live under the threat of famine, pestilence, hunger and starvation. Unimaginable numbers have died in the past century from famine and pestilence. From 1918 to 1920, the Spanish Influenza alone killed an estimated 50 million people!

Every day now almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes. That's one child every five seconds! Nearly 9 million children die before they reach their fifth birthday. One third of these deaths are due directly or indirectly to hunger and malnutrition.

Despite years of progress against hunger, it is estimated that more than 900 million people still suffer from it on a daily basis.

Again, none of this should come as a surprise, not when the Bible has so clearly warned us about it.



There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places.

Luke 21:11 NIV

Famines, pestilences, earthquakes? If this doesn't sound like today, what does?

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

All of this, and more, we see daily in our lounge rooms - through mass media. What do these signs mean? What can we take from them? How can they help us understand the story of our world, and our own place in it?

Firstly, one thing should be perfectly clear - the sad state of our world was predicted in the Bible. Most of these things, however sad, however horrific, must be understood in the larger context of what the Bible teaches about humanity, about evil, about suffering, and about the future of our planet. That's so much of what this series will be about - looking at the larger picture.

Secondly, these signs should help us know that tragedies are simply part of what it means to live in a world damaged by sin and evil. But how did it get this way? We will look very closely at that crucial question too.

Thirdly, these signs written so long ago should show us that, despite how things may appear to us, none of this has taken God by surprise. Far from being evidence that God doesn't exist, they help show that He does, because His Word has been so accurate. What else does His Word say to us about our times, and our place in it? The course will take us on this journey as well.

Fourthly, the signs were often given in the context of the end of this world, which leads to the promise of a better one. In other words, though often talking about distressful things, the signs point to the ultimate hope of a new world, one without everything that makes this one so miserable. In this course, we will study in depth the hope we have been given and the reasons for clinging to it.

THE SCRIPT

Even if it can *seem like we're just set down here*, deep down we sense a reason, a purpose for our lives. Eternity is etched deep in our souls. We're part of a story, a grand epic in which we each have our part to play. However small it might seem in contrast to the big picture itself, we are the stars in our own stories.

The Bible from beginning to end is essentially a book of stories—true stories. These hundreds of small individual stories, as well as yours and mine, collectively dovetail together as part of one big story. And that is the story God is telling.

These booklets are, really, all about the script.



NEXT IN THE SERIES:



*Uncover the origins and issues of earth's epic conflict
and find meaning in the bigger picture*

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