

## Meaningful Endeavor in the Kingdom of God

### Introduction

Meaningfulness is core to every endeavor of work with people in the kingdom of God; the opposite (meaninglessness) is a vanity beyond sensibility. St. Paul notes that our “labor *in the Lord*” is not in vain” (New International Version, 1988, 1 Corinthians 15:58)—it surely must not be. Every aspect of Jesus’ life in serving others was meaningful, so much so that the contemplation of the details of His life have compelled utter assessment by the greatest of minds in church history (compare John 21:25). Anyone who would pour themselves out in serving others (Rom. 12:7, 11; Eph. 4:12) must surely do so in a meaningful way. It is the thesis of this paper that there are core existential issues that are critical for a thought leader is to meaningfully influence others. Furthermore, without addressing these issues there will be minimal or no effect in the fundamental transformation of people’s lives. (For this paper, a thought leader in the Kingdom of God would include anyone who disseminates the ideas of God to others, such as a pastor, educator, pastoral counselor.) Wilhoit (1991, pp. 88, 91, 105-114,) points out that efforts with educating God’s people *must* meaningfully make a difference in their lives or what really is the point in any effort with connecting with people. This moves us further into the most relevant approach in an endeavor with people as a thought leader—the transformational mandate. The transformational view of imparting the faith (Wilhoit, 1991, 105-114) is an approach that makes sense in considering the mandates: “to make disciples” (Mt. 28:18-20); to be “salt” and “light” to people (Mt. 5:13-16); to bring people to maturity (1 Cor. 3:1-3; Eph. 4:13-15; Heb. 5:14; 2 Pet. 3:17-18); to make disciples (Mt. 28:18-20); to be a “fisher of men” (Mt. 4:19); to have the

ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:11-21); and so many other facets of this transformational mandate.

### **Touching Humanity**

This mandate to meaningfully touch a person's life, with a transformational intention, hits a nerve with humanity, and especially with those who have an "ear to hear" and a heart yearning for spiritual-psycho relief (Mt. 11:28-30). The "desire for meaning still slumbers, though submerged, beneath the extroversion" of humanity (Barrett, 1958, p. 8). Henry David Thoreau pinpointed this existential subterfuge: "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" (Silverman, 2012). Rahner (1978, p. 33) speaks of "the experience of emptiness, of inner fragility...of the absurdity of what confronts him." We see this so clearly in the effect Jesus had on the lives of people he was instructing (Mt. 7:28-29; Jn. 7:46). And there is such abundant social science research that religion that touches a human life and moves people into a sense of meaningfulness and wholeness (Cranney, 2013; Davis, Granqvist, Sharp, 2021; Koenig, 2017). We will examine in this paper the particulars of an approach that in this writer's estimation (though his experiences with ministry and in a private practice of counseling), resonates with humanity on a myriad of levels and categories.

Assessing things just from a pragmatic view point: "Meaningful material is learned more quickly and retained longer than material the learner judges to be meaningless" (Wilhoite, 1991, p. 132; see also pp. 133-137); and one must not "confuse learning meaningful material with meaningful learning" (Wilhoit, 1991, p. 133). This involves seeing the "big picture" (p. 133), which the existential issues provide—the picture of one's existence in the human experience. Wilhoit's details along this line are significant (p. 133). All efforts at delivering the faith must be for meaningful outcomes.

## The Existential Issues of Life

It is the yearning of the heart to understand oneself and the meaning of one's existence on this earth. A human being must find "a center of stability in the midst of his perplexity" (Trueblood, 1969, p. 8). Frankl (1952/1986) appeals for a "depth-psychology"...to examine human existence...in all its many layered extent; to look not only for its depths, but for its heights as well" (p. 8). His emphasis from psychotherapy to a deeper approach with humanity involving the idea of logos, which can be translated meaning or purpose, or the reason. Thus, work with people must be anchored in helping people to find meaning in life. This is foundational; apart from this, what else really matters?

To answer the deeper questions human beings have is to "scratch where people are itch." Klassen and McDonald (2002) focus on the real presence of a human "quest," and posit that this underlying drive is a "mature religious orientation rooted in existential struggle" and that it is a part of the "existential search for personal meaning." Existential philosophy has been prominent in human history and not a single existential issue has been excluded from the dialogue of the sages through history and particularly western civilization (Durant, 1926/1961).

Through the years of work with people in ministry, counseling, and in wrestling with his own personal existence, this writer has found five salient points in the human existence that compel the gravest of attention. As Barrett (1958, pp. 3-41) points out so thoroughly, there is an "existential uneasiness" ever present within humanity. (I have found this true with every person I have ever counseled.). Thus, to ignore existential issues is derelict at best, if the goal is meaningful and transformational impact, for "to the degree that a person comes to terms with and

reconciled these existential concerns,” will be to the degree of their “existential security.” (Van Tongeren, et al., 2013).

It is apparent to this writer, that there are five major existential issues that must be considered and resolved: the *purpose* of one’s life (macro and micro purpose), which involves having a meaningful existence; *security*—can one feel secure as a human being living east of Eden; *significance*—can one feel significance/value as a unique being in the human experience; *lifestyle*—“you exist, but how then should you live”; and *eternity*—“you exist, but will you exist forever.”

Developing further, it is the hypothesis of this writer that unless these fundamental existential issues are resolved, a person will never quite feel right or function whole as a human being. Given the gravity of these existential issues, it is this writer’s conviction that these existential issues speak profoundly and deeply to the unchurched, the nonbeliever, and religious people outside of the Christian faith. They represent a comprehensive theological anthropology for thought leaders (e.g., pastors, educators, counselors) in the Kingdom of God to resolve in themselves and articulate to those they have a voice with. As Wilhoite (1990, p. 58) asserts the imparter of the faith (i.e., educator) must be concerned with the “whole life” of every person. These existential issues are comprehensive in scope and provide a great basis for individual’s growth in the faith.

If the aforementioned points are foundational to the human existence, then it would sad at best and irresponsible at worst for a Christian thought leader to personally ignore them and to fail to engage others in dialogue about them. Therefore, it is incumbent upon leaders and educators in the Kingdom of God to have resolved these issues within their own lives/faith, if they are ever

going to be able to speak profoundly (vs. superficially), and with a substantive word from Scripture to God's people, a secular culture, and other religious groups (e.g., Islam).

These existential issues are critical for the building of a solid faith as a Christian. Thought leaders (spiritual leaders and educators in the Kingdom of God) must live out the truths of these existential issues and be able to impart them in cogent ways to practically everyone they come into contact with. The ultimate purpose of a thought leader in the kingdom of God is to help people in their most fundamental growth—these issues are perhaps the most important of all; and to help individuals to be fully human in every respect, and thus live out their humanity in maximized ways. They are inextricably linked to the gospel, the life of Jesus, the intent of the Creator, as this writer will demonstrate.

Tracey (1974) opines that “the most pressing question for theology is the very nature of the discipline,” so he presents a fundamental approach to doing theology. Part of his five approaches involve the “common human experience” and what he calls “the Christian fact.” Tracey brings subjectivity into the equation of doing theology with “transcendental reflection” as “the conditions of the possibility of our existing or understanding at all.”

It is important to clarify that these existential issues do not take the place of the gospel; they are ingrained in the gospel and speak in every way to the condition of humanity. It is the gospel/the greatest news anyone could ever embrace, and how beautiful are the feet of those who bring the “good news” to another human being (Isa. 52:7; Rom. 10:14-15). Now let's move on to explore the five existential issues and the importance of them in a fundamental and transformational instructing of people.

## **The Purpose and Meaning of a Person's Life (I)**

A person exists but what is the point of one's existence? A biblical/theological anthropology "provides people with a deep, unshakable sense of meaning" with respect to their existence (Wilhoite, 1990, p. 88). Without purpose can meaning exist—they are inextricably linked as I will unpack shortly. Jung (1963, p. 340) goes so far as to declare, "*Meaninglessness inhibits* fulness of life and is therefore equivalent to illness. Meaning makes a great many things enduring—perhaps everything." Frankl (1959/2006) discovered that a human being's sustenance, survivability and quality of life was linked to the meaning of his/her existence. Augustine (Schaff, 1886/1979, pp. 45, 46) poignantly put it: "Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee" and "I could not therefore exist, could not exist at all, O my God, unless Thou wert in me." All the theological instruction will be essentially a waste of effort if those under such tutelage are in a perpetual state of restlessness. Meaningfulness will inexorably lead to the transformation of a person.

Everything in life has a point for its existence. A person's cell phone has a specific point—communication and information. If it is used to dig ditches, it will quickly break and become meaningless. This is what happens to human beings that are not living according to the point of their existence—they break and their lives become meaningless. This is apparently what happened to Solomon on his journey of life as reported in his writing, Ecclesiastes, where he mentions the meaninglessness of life (33 times) (Ecc. 1:2, 14; 2:11), and thus he hated his life (Ecc. 2:17). Purpose and meaning are inextricably fused together. The meaning of your life aligns with the purpose.

### **Relational Paradigm**

The most fundamental reality of a human being is that he is a relational being made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28; 9:5-6; Jam. 3:9), and since God is a relational Being—the Creator,

it logically follows that this is the very point of the human existence. Relational beings have relationship: God, a being with Personhood, has relationship with His creation—people. A simple but basic understanding to our existence.

But it is not *just* a relationship with Him, but *a thrilling relationship* with Him (Isa. 26.9; 30.18; 61.10; Ps. 42.8; 84.2; 90.14; 92.4; Zeph. 3.17). Jesus referencing the word, “*Abba*” Father is indicative of the closest of the relationship with Him. Davis, et al (2021) offers that this theistic relational spirituality consist of both doctrinal and experiential representations, that synergize together and offer a “healthy theistic relational spirituality.” Theology supports a spirituality that is relational at its core. Jesus put it this way in the summing of the whole faith: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength...[and] love your neighbor as yourself” (New International Version, 1984, Mark 12:30-31)

The primary purpose of your life is thrilling relationship with God through Christ, and only after that relationship with Him, can a person have an appropriate relationship with people—made in the image of God. Indeed, “An appropriate emphasis on relationships is essential to transformational education” (Wilhoite, 1990, p. 112)

### **Macro and Micro Purpose**

We must delineate that there is both a macro purpose and micro purpose. The *macro* purpose is thrilling relationship with God, and out of that orientation, it is incumbent to get more specific with the *micro* purpose of what one does specifically through that relationship to bring glory to Him (1 Cor. 10:23-33; Col. 3:23-24). God’s people who have gifted to serve in various meaningful ways with their lives (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10; Eph. 4:7-13; cf. 2 Pet. 1:3). To help people realize both the macro and micro purposes of their lives is to be of great value to

another human being (see Mk. 5:1-20), for there is no other authentic purpose, no other authentic point to the human existence.

## Security (II)

We live east of Eden in a dangerous, cruel, and unloving world, and this has precipitated a deep insecurity within all of us. Most have been treated horribly by others and the result has been insecurity. Feeling secure in your own skin and in your relationships with people is a significant challenge for most people. Insecurity brings out the least in you in interfacing with others; security brings out the best in you in connecting with others.

In this discussion we are *not* referring to the Maslow's hierarchal idea of the need for safety and protection from harm, but to feeling secure as a human being in the human experience in the midst of other human beings. Security in this writer's sense has to do with an inner psychological-spiritual disposition. Though Maslow's idea of security is needed, this writer's approach is thinking of a psycho-spiritual disposition that transcends the world with a confidence that is only derived from a connection with God (Ps. 121:2; Jn. 16:33). We are not talking about the ersatz disposition of pride. This misled and sinful inner disposition cultivates an interfacing with life that actually drives the person farther away from an authentic security that could lead a human being to have the greatest of impact with his/her life (Pr. 18:18).

### Security vs. Insecurity

Security is an existential point of importance because, in being insecure person, the best person cannot show up in a given situation; the least person shows up in insecurity. The biblical mandates can hardly be expedited if one is insecure: having the spirit of love, power and discipline (2 Tim. 1:7); speaking truth to people (Lev. 19:17; Ezk. 3:18-21; 2 Cor. 3:8; 4:2-3;

Eph. 4:13-15; 1 Tim. 1:4; 6:7-19; 2 Tim. 4:2; Ti. 1:11, 13; 2:1-1, 15; 3:8, 10; cf. Ac. 13:9-11); and standing “firm” (1 Cor. 16:13; 2 Cor. 1:17-21; Gal. 5:1; Col. 4:12; cf. Pr. 25:26). Insecurity keeps a person from the best on the journey of life, delimits effectiveness, and keeps a person from opportunities to be used of God. It is certainly possible that a person may function out of insecurity in significant ways, but this would be rare among the masses of humanity.

Insecurity is a ubiquitous reality for every person, except perhaps for the narcissist (and sociopath) who live in delusion about their existence (Fromm, 1964, pp. 62-94; Dutton, 2012). Can you feel secure as an individual in your own skin? But how can they get to a place of utter security, out of which they will become utter assertive comporting their life in an effective manner.

### **Approaches in Dealing with Insecurity and Becoming Secure**

In this writer’s clinical/pastoral practice, three approaches to security have become apparent in helping people get to a reasonable secure place. *First*, one must viscerally identify with the theological truth about his/her life. Since, a person is God’s creation, there is a theological reality that is true about a human being. As Niebuhr (1964, p. 13) put it: “the Christian view of man” must be “understood primarily from the standpoint of God.” These theological perspectives about man in an inextricable connection to God include having value a person being made in God’s image (Gen. 1:26-27); being dearly loved by God (Jn. 3:16; Eph. 5:1); being a marvelous creature (Ps. 139:1ff); being completely unique in all of human history—no one has another’s DNA code; and experiencing in Christ “no condemnation” but living deeply in the grace of God (Rom. 8:1-2; Eph. 2:8-9); being “transformed from one degree of glory to the next” (2 Cor. 3:17-18); and being an instrument of God (Col. 1:29). It is

imperative to stress that a godly security does not come in oneself apart from God but in God who defines and establishes self in a stunning theological anthropology.

*Second*, one must stop comparing yourself to others (2 Cor. 10:12; Gal. 5:26; 6:4, 5; cf. Ecc. 7:14). Comparison is the bane of humanity. Satan evidently compared himself to God. Cain compared himself to Able and evil ensued from that point on in human history (Gen. 4:1-16; cf. Heb. 11:4). The common aphorism, “Comparison is the death of joy” speaks of an existential deleteriousness that takes place in the transactions between people. The focus must then be to *assess* people (not compare) through a positive interfacing with a person in the positive experiences of: of gratitude, finding inspiration, learning, loving the person, serving, praying for, enjoying, and encouraging. This positive interfacing is the way of Christ. The 59 “one-another” passages in the New Testament (e.g., Mk. 9:50; Jn. 13:34; Rom. 12:10, 16; 13:8; 15:7, 14, 16) give a comprehensive alternative to the toxic interfacing of comparison.

*Third*, on the journey to security, a person must be emphatic in defeating the critical voices that cultivate insecurity. The big challenge is regret and self-loathing in the human psyche. This tends to cultivate hyper-insecurity. Believing God’s truth about oneself vs. embracing a deception, is imperative in reaching a level of security among people (Jn. 8:32; 17:17).

On a personal note, some of the most embarrassing moments in this writer’s life came out of insecurity, and the best did not emerge as a disciple of Jesus. What is amazing is to realize that in Jesus’s life there is not a hint of insecurity or embarrassment. This truly came in His secure connection with the Father (Jn. 17 points to this secure connection). In following Jesus (1 Jn. 2:6), we would do well to follow the existential reality of His life—utter security in the Presence of God (Ps. 16:18; 40:2; 91:1-12; Pr. 3:26; Rom. 8:38-39; 1 Jn. 2:6).

### **Significance (III)**

A human being was created to be significant in the human experience, not a cipher (nonentity), nor just a “bump on the log.” (Certainly not a prideful arrogant being.) A person tends to feel good about one’s life if living with significance. (This idea of significance certainly fits with Maslow’s needs for dignity and self-fulfillment.) Insignificance sets a person up for disillusionment. Without the pursuit of significance, a person’s life can become trivial and/or caught up in self-destructive behavior (Kidner, 1976, p. 99).

#### **How to Become a Significant Human Being**

How does one become significant? It comes by taking the best of yourself and pouring it out in serving others. Self-centeredness delimits a human being; serving maximizes a human being, and the full potential and magnitude of a person’s life is realized. Jesus pointed this out when Peter tried to deter Him from going to the cross (Mt. 16:21-23). Jesus retorted: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever want to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it” (New International Version, 1984, Matthew 16:24-25).

Many have posited that this is one of the highest needs we have to be an actualized human being. We have a drive to be significant as a person among people. Deep down we want our life to count. Significance must not be confused with pride. Pride is a focus on self, which cultivates conceit, egotism and narcissism. Significance comes through a focus on others. It is important to observe that a person only feels significance when taking the good or best of his life and pouring it out for others.

### **The Drive to Make One's Life Count**

Making one's life count is a drive that goes with our progressive nature. The words of Steven Grellet, the French Quaker and missionary seem poignant here: "I have to live with myself, and so I want to be fit for myself to know. I don't want to stand at the setting sun, and hate myself for the things I have done. I shall pass through this world but once. If, therefore there can be any kindness I can show or any good thing I can do for any fellow being let me do it now...let me not defer it, or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again" (Ratcliffe, 2016).

### **Lifestyle (IV)**

People want to know how to live. That is why they are vulnerable to the craziest advice available. Peterson (2018) who has had enormous appeal to humanity all over the world, whose videos has gone viral, has tapped into the deep longings of the human soul and addressed cogently lifestyle issues, albeit, not without great controversy. His appeals are deeply existential and carried through the vehicles of theology and psychology. His charge to the broadest of humanity is to "set your sights on the betterment of being. Align yourself, in your soul, with truth and the highest good. There is a habitable order to establish and beauty to bring into existence. There is evil to overcome, suffering to ameliorate, and yourself to better" (p. 109).

A person exists, but then how shall a person live? Lifestyle is up for grabs in democracies, but a uniformity is determined in totalitarian states (e.g., North Korea). This issue of how to live has been with us from the very beginning of human existence (e.g., Garden of Eden, giving of the Ten Commandments, Confucius, Aristotle, Ethics, Mencius). Is there a lifestyle that well fits a human being? Are there lifestyles that are demonstratively destructive or inimical to a human being's life? With respect to human history—"wide is the gate and broad is

the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (New International Version, 1984, Matthew 7:13-14). It is lifestyle that determines the destiny of a human being and with it a life of misery or a life of joy.

It seems axiomatic that when a person lives right, they feel right; if a person lives badly, they tend to feel badly. More than just interesting social science research indicate a correlation between faith and experiencing wellness (Chen, et al. 2020; Davis, Granqvist & Sharp, 2021; Maysless & Russo-Netzer, 2017; Rogers, 2020; Cranny, 2013).

But who defines how to live? The nihilist, Nietzsche (1885/1968) asserts that existence boils down to power—might makes right. There is no right or wrong. Morality is for the weak. He predicted the end of Christianity’s influence upon a society and announced with bitter undertones, “Nihilism stands at the door” (p. 7). It constantly stands at the door, but “hell,” which is what nihilism brings to a human being, will not prevail over the church (Mt. 16:17-19). (Nietzsche is dead and Christianity continues to have the most beautiful effects upon human beings.) Let me proceed to delineate just a few lifestyle factors germane to our discussion on lifestyle with respect to theological anthropology, thought leaders in the Kingdom and disseminating truth about lifestyle.

### **Life of Love**

Perhaps more than anything else, love is the greatest reality in the human existence (1 Cor. 13:1ff). A disciple of Jesus is to live a life of love (Eph. 5:2; Jn. 13:34-35). Kierkegaard (1847/1962/2009) poignantly states that love in its “most inward depths [is] unfathomable” and has “an unfathomable relationship with the whole of existence” and “a human being’s love is grounded, still more deeply, in God’s love” (p. 27). God is the perfect lover, and he created us

for the perfect love with Him and others. Unfortunately, the best we can experience in our depravity is a good love. In eternity, we will experience the perfect love (1 Cor. 13:13).

Fromm (1956) observes that human beings are starving for love, that love it is the answer to the problems of human existence, and “any theory of love must begin with a theory of man, of human existence” (p. 7). Love is rooted in theological anthropology. The world and sin creates this separateness and isolation with others, and if perpetuated will cultivate anxiety, guilt and shame, and insanity. Thus, “the deepest need of man, is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness” (p. 9), and ultimately to find and give love (p. 7-38).

### **Leadership and Lifestyle**

Thought leaders in the Kingdom of God must address the lifestyle of people in specific ways. *First*, they must point to Jesus the ultimate lifestyle to emulate (1 Jn. 2:6; 4:17). Thus, they must know His life to be able to articulate about Him (cf., the writings of Max Lucado and Charles Edward Jefferson who have apparently pondered His life so deeply that they overflow in compelling prose). But, beyond this, they must (Greek word *dei*, which implies a strong moral necessity) demonstrate the lifestyle of a disciple of Jesus. They must provide an example of *imago Dei* and thus *imago Christi* (1 Cor. 11:1; 15:49; Heb. 13:7; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 Jn. 3:2). Leaders are to be “imitators of God” as seen in the life of Jesus (Eph. 5:1-2). They must demonstrate this higher road for humanity—a way of life that fits the human soul and that is quite irresistible and attractive (Tit. 2:10; 1 Pet. 3:3-4). Being “salt” in this world involves cultivating a thirst in the souls of people. This will only come as the leader is deeply affected in this walk with God. As the pastor-theologian, John Baker-Batsel discovered, “If you would speak to others with authority, you must first speak to God with intimacy” (Sweet, 2004, p. 3).

*Second*, they must proclaim the doctrine of *imago Dei* (human beings made in the image of God) and *imago Christi* (living in the image of Christ) (Rom. 8:29). As Kilner (2015, p. 311) puts it: “Nothing less than liberation and devastation are at stake when discussing humanity in the image of God.”

*Third*, they must confront any lifestyle that is sinful—an offense to God (e.g., getting drunk vs. getting “high” in the Spirit—Eph. 5:18) and contrary to the person’s well-being (Jn. 5:14; 7:53-8:1-11; Rom. 6:1ff.; 1 Cor. 15:34; 2 Tim. 2:25). It is unkind to an individual to not confront that which will destroy them. A thought leader in the Kingdom of God, whose mandate is for the transformation of individuals must realize how a sinful lifestyle hinders the transformational goals for a person (Wilhoite, 1991, pp. 66-68). Ignoring sin in people’s lives will not allow them to be whole spiritually or emotionally/psychologically (Menninger, 1978). In one respect, he must engage in spiritual warfare for the souls of human beings (Eph. 6:1-10; 1 Tim. 6:12).

### **The Greatest Lifestyle for a Human Being**

From a theological/Christian anthropology, the greatest lifestyle a human being can live is exemplified in Jesus (Mt. 11:28-30; Jn. 14:6). The image of God is restored in a human being who becomes a disciple of Christ (Rom. 8:29), and then goes on to be the human being they were intended to be. A disciple of Jesus is compelled to live a lifestyle radically different from the world (2 Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 4:17-32; 5:1-21), and to follow the example of how to live like Christ (1 Cor. 2:16; Eph. 5:1; Phil. 2:5; 1 Th. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:21; 1 Jn. 2:6)—the greatest life ever lived in human history, and all the world could not contain all the books that could be written about the depths of his Being (Jn. 21:25).

The Holy Spirit produces the most remarkable human being through the process of sanctification (2 Cor. 3:16-18; Gal. 5:22-23; 1 Th. 4:3-4, 7; Heb. 9:14; 12:14; 13:12). What is the outcome of such influences upon a human life: wisdom, gratitude, serving, love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control. Not bad stuff for a human being. In fact, the precedent is that “no law is against them” (Gal. 5:23). Upon this kind of lifestyle and virtue you could build a civilization, you could build a civil community, and you could build a church community. (See Johnson, 1997 as he delineates as one of his prominent themes how lifestyle and virtue shaped the American republic.)

### **The Sinful Lifestyle**

A theological/Christian anthropology asserts that evil exists in this world and that a sinful lifestyle is counter-human, inimical to the human existence, and is contrary to how a human being was created to live. There is an observable difference between those who live in a righteous manner and those who chose to live in a sinful manner (Ps. 1:1ff.; Mal. 3:18). There is a huge psychological tradeoff that people experience in giving themselves to a lifestyle of sin (e.g., guilt, shame, anxiety, depression) (Menninger, 1978).

Fromm (1964, pp. 37-61) provides an insightful psychoanalytic perspective on two divergent lifestyles: those that are inclined toward death (necrophilia—a love of death) compared to an individual who has a love for life (biophilia). A Christian/theological anthropology redeems the person *from* a lifestyle of death (Eph. 2:1-10; Col. 1:13) and allows that person to get caught up in a pro-life lifestyle and in live life indeed (Jn. 10:10). Thus, the “world system” cultivates a culture of death (e.g., abortion, euthanasia, transgender mutilation, promoting of alcohol, legalization of marijuana for recreational purposes—destruction of the brain) (see Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 1 Jn. 5:19); the Kingdom promotes a culture of life.

The lifestyle of a Christian is the greatest life one could possibly live because one is a disciple of the greatest life ever live. Jesus brings an “abundant” life (Jn. 10:10 *zoe*, a quality of life); the “thief” only brings misery to humanity (Jn. 10:10 “to kill, steal and destroy.” Those who are disciples of the “evil one” have brought about the greatest misery humanity has ever seen (e.g., concentration camps, the gulag). Any philosophy that brings about destruction is aligned with the “evil one”, and for those who think in rational, even utilitarian terms this is quite insane, as Chesterton points out in not too few of his essays (Chesterton, 2011). As Jung (1963, p. 346) put it, “Practical life cannot be suspended in an everlasting contradiction”—a lifestyle contrary to that which he was intended to be.

It seems axiomatic that most people feel there is something wrong with themselves. There seems to be an “existential fragility” and longing for vulnerability as Brene Brown has so amply pointed out in her research (2012, 2015, 2018). The famous playwright, W. Somerset Maugham (1938/1988), in his autobiography perhaps speaks for most of humanity (as Augustine also did in his Confessions) in saying, “For my part I do not think I am any better or any worse than most people, but I know that if I set down every action of my life and every thought that has crossed my mind the world would consider me a monster of depravity” (p. 38). This fits well with biblical anthropology (Rom. 3:9-18).

Lifestyle is an existential issue that can be addressed with great confidence by God’s people. Only they can provide the message that will steer people to a life that will bring them the greatest fulfillment as they live on the face of this earth.

## Eternity (V)

A human being exists, but will he live forever? This is perhaps one of the greatest questions mankind has wrestled with. Becker (1973) has done a thorough historical analysis of this struggle of humanity. With respect to man's mortality, one of his most poignant conclusions is sobering to say the least (Becker, 1973, pp. 268-69):

“We saw that there really was no way to overcome the real dilemma of existence, the one of the mortal animal who at the same time is conscious of his mortality. A person spends years coming into his own, developing his talent, his unique gifts, perfecting his discriminations about the world, broadening and sharpening his appetite, learning to bear the disappointments of life, becoming mature, seasoned—finally a unique creature in nature, standing with some dignity and nobility and transcending the animal condition; no longer driven, no longer a complete reflex, not stamped out of any mold. And then the real tragedy...it takes sixty years of incredible suffering and effort to make such an individual, and then he is good only for dying. This painful paradox is not lost on the person himself—least of all himself. He feels agonizingly unique, and yet he knows that doesn't make any difference as far as ultimates are concerned. He has to go the way of the grasshopper, even though it takes longer.” (pp. 268-69)

Without question death is the greatest enemy of mankind (1 Cor. 15:26) and humanity has stood in trepidation of this dark reality (Ac. 4:16; Heb. 2:15). But the “One and Only” came down the pike of human history, took on the experience, beat it and declared, “I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in me, though he dies, will live again” (New International Version, 1984, John 11:25). And in that same passage, he challenges those who hear his voice, “Do you believe this?”

If there was ever a mystery to unlock with people, this is it. As William Butler Yeats quipped somewhere, “Sex and death are the only things that can interest a serious mind.” This existential issue can be wonderfully addressed from a Christian/theological anthropology, and will capture a serious mind.

The evidence/reasoning for an eternity is convincing (though it is not the intention of this paper to present an apologia for eternity: philosophical arguments (e.g., C.S. Lewis—“if a man cannot be satisfied with this life, it is perhaps he was made for a different world”), empirical arguments (e.g., Near Death Experiences, quantum physics and quantum mechanical), biblical theology (e.g., “eternity in the hearts of man” Ecc. 3:11), and the life of Jesus (Jn. 11:25; 1 Cor. 15:57).

As C. S. Lewis commented somewhere, “The heart never yearns for something that doesn’t exist.” If one yearned to go to New Jersey, New Jersey would have to exist. If one yearned to go to the beach, the beach would have to exist. We only yearn for those things that do in fact exist. And the yearning for an eternity exists in the hearts of human beings (Ecc. 3:11). Why that yearning? It’s there because, in fact, heaven exists. It is an existential reality.

### **Connecting with People in Existential Reality**

The reality of existential issues in peoples’ lives demand attention. As Kung (1980, p. 432) asserts: “Reality itself demands a reaction. Within reality I must take a stand, live, act and take up a position as a human being. Every human being decides for himself his fundamental attitude toward reality...but reality itself invites me, challenges me. It demands my answer, my reaction, my free reaction.” If in fact these existential issues are of paramount importance in a

transformational approach in teaching the faith through various modalities, how can they be addressed in the lives of people?

*First*, the leader must have wrestled and resolved these issues in his own life, for as the saying goes, “you cannot impart what you do not possess.” These existential issues must be caught as well as taught. “The character of the teacher is as important as the knowledge the teacher has” (Wilhoit, 1991, p. 54). Reflecting on the leadership of Sir Ernest Shackleton, through his grueling Antarctica experience, Morrell and Capparell (2001) make a very good salient point: “life is more about the inner journey as about the actual distance traveled” (p. 7). How true of a leader in the Kingdom of God.

The leader must demonstrate: his *purpose* (macro and micro) for existence—relationship with God and others in a “chemistry” of love; *security* as a human being made in God’s image living out a stunning theological reality; *significance* in a life being poured out for others; *lifestyle* as an example for others as a disciple of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1); and *eternity*—faith and confidence in dealing with the issue of mortality, anticipating the greatest future for his existence (1 Cor. 2:9; Heb. 11:1ff.).

*Second*, the thought leader must be involved with discipleship, as Jesus was (Mt. 28:18-20; 1 Cor. 11:1; 2 Tim. 2:2) (Ogden, 2003; Moody, 2021; Scazzero, 2021; Coleman, 1964). This writer has found therapeutic discipleship very effective in the pastoral counseling context, especially in dealing with the aforementioned existential issues. Scazzero’s (2021) asserts they many in the church are “not experiencing deep change beneath the surface of their lives” and his primary reason for this assertion is the lack of discipleship. Ogden (2003, p.22) feels discipleship in the church is “superficial” but calls for a growth with a commitment to go deeper. The existential issues will do just that.

*Third*, the church must be the nourishing environment Jesus intended it to be (Eph. 4:16). “People change most readily when they are in environments that foster change” (Wilhoite, 1990, p. 113). Human development science has demonstrated how context affects a person dramatically (Lerner, 2018). It seems to this writer that these existential issues, which are relationally anchored have a dramatic impact on challenging people to function in the deepest of ways within the fellowship. Therefore, it would seem incumbent to this writer that this corpus of material or curriculum would serve God’s people well, moving from just an esoteric and philosophical existential dialogue, to a more *lingua franca* dialogue among all people on a congregational level. (This writer is making such an endeavor.)

There are ultimately two realities in the human experience: the world system or the Kingdom of God. The dynamic at work in the *world* is a “chemistry” in which people having a deleterious effect upon each other (2 Tim. 3:1-5). The dynamic in the Kingdom of God involves a “chemistry” that is nourishing (Eph. 4:16). Jesus has delivered us from the “dominion of darkness”—the world system, and “transferred us in the Kingdom of His beloved Son” (New International Version, 1984, Colossians 1:13). It is in this environment of spiritual reality that the existential issues can ultimately be wrestled with and solved to the great joy of human beings.

## Conclusion

It is the hope of this writer that the specific corpus of this paper, i.e., the existential issue that have been surfaced, will represent substance from which thought leaders in the kingdom of God will consider in their own lives and in imparting a substance of great value to every person

in the Kingdom through various modalities. The bottom line for this effort with these particular issues is two-fold. *First*, it is the premise of this writer that these biblical/existential issues will allow an individual to effectively evaluate and analyze his/her existence on a deeper and more specific level, which will then lead to greater maturity and effectiveness. *Second*, it seems to this writer that these existential/theological issues will stir God's people to engage in a "fully reflective understanding of the Christian witness of faith as decisive for the human existence" (Ogden, 1972, p. 22).

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