

Christianity & The Meaning of Life by Ivan Liew

INTRODUCTION:

About a month ago on the first day of the PC Show in Suntec City I rushed down to the convention centre to buy a new handphone. I had been waiting for my Singtel contract to be up, and the phone I wanted was being released that day. So I got it – my new HTC Touch Diamond! I love this phone! It's the best phone I ever had with fantastic features. I read my email on it, compose documents, and surf the Internet. And when I put it next to my other phone that is 2 years old – well that SonyEricsson K610i looks really old and uncool.

The funny thing is that 2 years ago, it was that K610i that was the best phone I ever had, and in 2 years time this Touch Diamond will be passé and I'll be scouting for new handphone.

Aren't all of us like this? We look forward to that next new handbag, or that upgraded computer. Now that's fine to a point – but when this search for this new thing is actually our search for greater satisfaction, or more fulfilment in life then we're heading for inevitable disappointment. Because you and I know that it's only a matter of time before we get bored and we need either a new model or a new hobby altogether!

MEANING OF LIFE

Tonight we're going to talk about the meaning of life and how there must be more life than just pursuing our interests. There must be more to life than simply having fun with our hobbies or past-times. There must be more than climbing the corporate ladder. There must be more to life than simply enjoying life.

You see, if we don't think carefully about the meaning of our lives, we will spend our time and efforts making life more comfortable for ourselves and our family. Then when we've reached a certain level of comfort and there's still a nagging lack of satisfaction deep in our hearts, we think, is there more to life than this...?

I remember in my secondary school days and really looking forward to the freedom that university life would offer. Maybe that would be really satisfying. I got to university and it was good, but there was still more that life had to offer. I thought maybe when I get a girlfriend, but none of the girls I liked seem to like me back so it wasn't very fruitful. Then in my final year of university I got a girlfriend and it felt great! But first

loves, though wonderful, usually don't last – so that relationship ended and we all wonder “what next?”

Many of us are like this. We seek one thing after the other, hoping that the next thing brings us satisfaction. We switch jobs to get more money, we buy more things, we advance in our careers. If we don't get what we want we feel disappointed – and understandably so.

Imagine how JIA LI ?? feels after having come so close to an Olympic medal not once but twice, but then narrowly missing it?

But not achieving our aspirations is not the saddest thing. The saddest thing is when we HAVE achieved whatever we're pursuing, there's nothing more to get and we look back and find we're still not satisfied. When we're at the top and we still feel that way, well ... that is very sad and very awful. This is why we hear of many people who are at the top of their careers, who are world famous, commit suicide.

The Christian worldview says that all of have this deep hunger in our lives, something that we are constantly seeking to fill. That hunger cannot be temporarily forgotten when we get a new pay rise, a new relationship, or a new gadget but it can't be filled by these things because it is a SPIRITUAL hunger.

Only one thing, only one person can truly fill that hunger. In John 6, Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.” I can satisfy the spiritual hunger in your life. No matter how many other good other things you have, they can't fill it but I can.

Leo Tolstoy, was a very famous writer, recognized for having written some of the greatest novels of all time including “War and Peace” and “Anna Karenina”. Tolstoy was born into a wealthy Russian family in the 1800's. Growing up, he rejected Christianity, and like many young men of his day was ambitious and pleasure seeking. He tried pleasure, sex, gambling, and the wild life. Did that bring him meaning and satisfaction? No. He inherited money, made good investments, and had even more money. There was still no ultimate satisfaction for him so he continued searching. He grew in fame and success as a writer where even the people he disagreed with respected him for his great writing. But that didn't bring him meaning. He got married, had children, and a happy family and in all senses of the world was surrounded by success.

But one question drove him to near suicide: What meaning does my life have that the inevitability of death does not destroy? Because if there is not more to life than the physical, then death destroys everything and life is rendered meaningless.

He finally found the answer not in the fancy things of life, but among the poor people of his time who were Christians. He saw in them their faith and relationship with God and this was the answer for Tolstoy. A loving and ongoing relationship with God is real and possible, and it is one that is ultimately lasting and fulfilling.

Most of us have grown up being conditioned that religion is about a set of moral teachings – do this and don't do that. So when I talk about Christianity and having relationship with God as two things being side by side, it may not immediately gel in your mind how they connect.

You see, Christianity is NOT primarily about a lists of do's and don'ts. It's not even primarily about how to live a morale life. While that is important, it is FIRST about filling this search for meaning in our lives with the love of a relationship with God. And like a bubbling spring, that love will overflow from the inside of our lives to change both the inside and the outside in countless numbers of ways.

But you may say, "I'm perfectly happy with my life right now so why would I want this relationship with God?" Well I'm glad you're happy, but let me put it to you this way....

Imagine you went to your uncle's house to watch a movie and he had a big 42" TV and a new DVD player and recorder.

"Wow, that's nice" you say, "Is it new?"

"Yes, I won it in a lucky draw!"

So you sit down to watch and your uncle walks to an old VHS cassette player, inserts a VHS tape and starts the movie!

"Errr, Uncle don't you use the DVD?"

"No, I'm perfectly happy with my tape player."

"But have you tried the DVD uncle? They're much better"

"What for I try? I'm happy with the tape player!"

"But you already have such a nice TV and DVD player already uncle, you'll enjoy your movies so much more and it doesn't even cost you anything cos you won this all in a lucky draw!"

“Too busy to try new things! Besides, I’m perfectly happy with this tape player!”

You don’t want to be pushy or rude so you sit down to watch the grainy movie with bad sound quality cos of the old tape. At the end of the movie you say, “Thanks uncle... how about next week I come back and I’ll bring the movie for you okay?”

The point is, you can be happy now but God has already made available something even better. And Jesus says that this upgrade he offers is one that will never be surpassed. There is no HD-TV after Jesus! Jesus said, I am the bread of life. He comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” In other words, Jesus says that when we receive from him we will be satisfied forever. So if you’re happy with your life right now that’s great, but I still invite you to find out more about a relationship with God through Jesus that will satisfy you forever.

If this Christian message is true, that God wants to have a relationship with us and has made it possible through Jesus, then it is truly the most wonderful message on earth. If it’s false then you can throw it on the rubbish heap. Unfortunately many people think that Christianity is moderately true, and moderately true is something that it cannot be.

Many people say, “I believe Jesus was a great moral teacher, but I cannot accept that he was God in human flesh.” This is the politically correct middle road. It is the view that Christianity is moderately true. If we are intellectually honest we cannot hold that middle ground because Jesus doesn’t allow us to do that. He claimed to be God in human flesh and to have the answers to life’s deepest questions. He claimed that if we followed him, we would experience deep peace and fulfilment in our lives. Now if he’s right then that’s a great message for everyone. And there’s plenty of evidence that we can share with you – something we’ll talk more about later in the Alpha Course coming up on Saturday evenings.

Let’s go back to this word “truth”. When we talk about Jesus being the truth, it means something more than just intellectual or historical truth. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” It’s not just about knowing the truth about Jesus but about EXPERIENCING that truth. Let me give you an example. I am now married to my wonderful wife Renata, but suppose that before I met her I was surfing the Internet and came across her FaceBook web page. I learned about her and read about it her,

and she seemed like a wonderful person. I had all this knowledge about her and I told you, wow, this Renata is really a great person you ought to meet her! But I have I met her? Errr...no not really....

But the wonderful reality is that we are married and so if I told you now about my wife and her wonderful character, her fun personality, her uncanny sense of direction, and her passion for life then you know that this comes from personal experience because she's my wife.

In the same way, when I or another Christian talks about Jesus it's from personal experience. We have EXPERIENCED the truth through relationship with him. This is the kind of real and relevant truth we're talking about.

Some people say, "Well that's good for you and true for you, but it's not for me." That's another politically correct statement but it's not something you can hold on too for too long while being intellectually honest. If what Jesus said is true then it DOES apply to you, but if what he said was false then it's certainly not good for us Christians! We're mistaken and deluded and someone better convince us otherwise.

Someone has invited you to this dinner because they're your friend or family member and they care about you. This dinner is an introductory dinner, a taste if you will, of the full Alpha Course that is beginning 2 Saturdays from now.

The Alpha Course is about being able to have the kind of honest dialog with one another that we know is truly deep and meaningful but we don't often get around to talking about.

I'm so glad to see you here tonight, but I invite you back 2 Saturdays from now for this Alpha Course. Each time we meet we'll have a talk exploring one aspect of Christianity and the meaning of life. If Jesus' message has even the slightest chance of being the truth, then it's certainly worth your finding out whether it is real or not. You'll get to ask any question you like and you'll get to share any opinion you have. We like to say in Alpha, that no question is too simple nor too hostile.

We hope that you'll join us in the exploration of the Christian faith and experience with us that the Christian life is not a boring life, but it's an exciting life that fills our life with meaning and purpose. It's not untrue, and it's just true for me but not for you – it's THE TRUTH which all of us can experience. And it's relevant for our lives right now in 2008 in

Singapore because this truth of our relationship with Jesus will transform our entire lives.

Conclusion

Some of you have listened to me tonight and you think that's great – you know this already, and it affirms your faith and the reality of your relationship with God - that's wonderful.

Some of you have listened tonight and you may feel it's not for you. You're not convinced, but I hope you're willing to investigate further. I hope you felt comfortable enough with us tonight in the dinner and during this message, that you would explore this further with us. Perhaps you want to just ask us for Bible or a book and read it on your own, and you could do that. But perhaps you would like to explore this further with others in a fun and friendly setting like we had tonight. This is what the Alpha Course is about and we'll begin doing that this coming Saturday night.

Now maybe there's just one person here tonight and you've listened to me and you feel that this relationship with Jesus is spot on. You're ready to experience this truth and you want this relationship with him to be real, and you want to be sure of that. You can have that tonight, and it's done by telling Jesus that we believe in Him. We can do this silently in our heart as we talk to Jesus in a prayer. We believe he came to this earth and died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins so that we can be forgiven of the wrong that we have done. We believe he rose from the dead and invites us to have a relationship with him. When we make this prayer we are inviting Jesus into our life and we will begin experiencing him as the way the truth and the life.

Perhaps there is just one person who would like to do this, so let me ask all of you to be kind enough to close your eyes and bow your heads so that this person can receive Jesus in a comfortable way for him or her tonight.