

QUESTIONS WE SHOULD ALL ASK

God is always reaching out to us and inviting us to enter into a greater and more complete union with Him. To that end, God inspires us to ask questions and to seek answers about the purpose and meaning of life. Of interest here is the fact that man is the only earthly creature who asks questions – and who can ask questions. Animals and plants do not and cannot ask questions because they do not have an intellect and a free will.

As human beings, it is through our ability to ask questions that we come to realize we are free. By our ability to ask questions, we also come to realize that the choices we make will determine the course of our lives. It is our freedom which allows us to embrace what is good and to reject what is evil. We can ponder and think about why we should do one thing and not another. However, we are not compelled to do either. With our intellect, we can reflect on how we should proceed and consider what course of action would be best. Should I do this or should I do that?

Saint John Paul observed that as we go through life, there are five questions we cannot avoid. These five questions will arise in the minds of all who seek to know the truth about life and its meaning. These questions are as follows:

Why was I born?

What is the meaning of life and its purpose?

Where and how can I find happiness?

Why is life so full of pain and difficulty?

How should I live my life, by what model or principles or arrangements?

In a way, each of these questions has to do with our ultimate end. The first question has to do with our very existence. To ask “Why was I born?” is, in a sense, to ask “Why am I here at all?” It expresses the contingency of life, that our existence is not a necessary thing, but rather, that we are dependent upon something (or someone) for our existence. This question points us to the existence of a Creator. As we reflect on our own existence, we come to realize that we are not self-created, independent or autonomous. Rather, we are dependent beings. Our existence depends upon someone else and that someone else is God.

The second question we cannot avoid is this: “What is the meaning of life and its purpose?” This question goes to the very point of life. Behind this question is the implication that life has a purpose. There is a reason why we are here; there must be something we are meant to do or accomplish. Strangely, few people think about this question. Many simply go from day to day, like leaves driven by the wind, drifting from one thing to another with no purpose or goal. They lead what the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates called an “unexamined life.” Socrates also said this kind of life is not worth living. It is to live as the animals do, a way of life unworthy for human beings.

So then, "What is the meaning of life and its purpose?" The answer is to decide if we want to live with God forever in heaven or apart from Him forever in hell. That is the purpose of life. Everything else we do, everything else that happens to us is secondary to making that one decision. We have been created and given life for that one reason and that one reason only.

The third question we cannot avoid is this: "Where and how can I find happiness?" Everyone wants to be happy, and happiness results from living as we were made to live. With regard to man in particular, happiness comes about when our intellect and our will are fully engaged, that is, when we are knowing and when we are loving. Furthermore, the more we know and the more intensely we love, the happier we are. That means we will be happiest when we know and love God because God is the greatest good. That said, many people seek happiness in created things or in money or power or prestige. Others seek happiness in bodily pleasures through sex or drugs or food. However, none of these things last, and so none can offer lasting happiness. Only God is eternal, and it is only in God that we will find true happiness.

The fourth question we cannot avoid is this: "Why is life so full of pain and difficulty?" To put it another way, "Why is there suffering in the world?" This is perhaps the most perplexing of all questions we will face in life. The answer can only truly be understood from the standpoint of our Christian faith. No other religion and no other philosophical system offer a satisfying answer to the apparent contradiction between belief in a good and loving God and the existence of suffering. It is only through the cross that suffering makes sense. When united to the cross, suffering purifies us of selfishness and enables us to love with the kind of love that we will find in heaven. However, it is only through reflection and prayer that we can come to understand this.

The fifth and final question is this: "How should I live my life, by what model or principles or arrangements?" The answer is by following the Ten Commandments. They are the guides that help us love God above all things and love our neighbor as our very self. The Commandments help us to keep the golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." It's essential that we reflect on these great questions of life because the answers to them lead us to God.