

DISCUSSION GUIDE

A small group series exploring different perspectives on living forever.

SO YOU WANT TO LIVE
FOREVER?



OCCA

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MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH

Opening Discussion

- Why do you think conversations about death are often avoided in Western culture?
- How do you feel personally about addressing these topics?
- **Watch the video:** *Matters of Life and Death with Ben Thomas*

Session Overview

1. **Death as a Taboo Subject:** Although many people think about death frequently, only a small percentage are willing to talk openly about it.
2. **The Certainty of Death:** Despite advances in medicine and technology, the reality remains that death has a 100% occurrence rate.
3. **Cultural Attempts to Defy Death:** People invest in all manner of ways to defeat the inevitability of death. Examples include scientific pursuits to prolong life and even extreme measures like blood transfusions from younger individuals.

4. Worldview Perspectives on Death

- **Atheism:** Death marks the end of existence.
- **Reincarnation:** Death is a transition to another form of life, where the cycle begins again.
- **Christianity:** Death is not the end, eternal life is promised through faith in Jesus Christ, who conquered death through his resurrection.

Bible Reflection

Read John 11:17-27

Context: Lazarus was a close friend of Jesus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, who lived in Bethany near Jerusalem. The sisters sent word for Jesus to come straight away to heal their sick brother. Jesus however, delays his visit.

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹ 'Lord,' Martha said to Jesus, 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.' ²³ Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'

²⁴ Martha answered, 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.' ²⁵ **Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even**

though they die;²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?’

²⁷ ‘Yes, Lord,’ she replied, ‘I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.’

Exploring the Passage

- What do verses 17-19 tell us about the state of Lazarus, and people’s reactions and responses to that state?
- What did Mary and Martha do when they heard that Jesus was coming? What do Martha’s words reveal about her view of Jesus at this point?
- How might Martha’s statement in verse 24 reflect broader cultural beliefs about death and resurrection at the time?
- What is Jesus claiming in verses 25-26?
- How has Martha’s understanding of Jesus developed from the beginning of the passage to the end?
- How does Jesus’ promise in the passage compare to views on death and afterlife in other worldviews?

Further Discussion

- How does your worldview shape the way you think about death? What fears or hopes do you associate with it?
- What are you hoping for as you watch and discuss this series?

BEING REMEMBERED

Opening Discussion

- Why do you think people seek ways to be remembered after they die?
- How does the desire for legacy shape the way some people live?
- **Watch the video:** *Being Remembered with Charlie Styles*

Session Overview

1. **The Human Desire for Legacy:** Many people seek a form of 'immortality' by attaching their names to achievements, buildings or memorials.
2. **Commemoration in Culture:** Throughout history, societies have built statues, memorials, and named landmarks to honour individuals. Poems and songs also stand as lasting forms of commemoration.
3. **The Fragility of Legacy:** Cultural shifts often lead to the removal or re-evaluation of historical memorials and achievements.

- 4. The Illusion of Lasting Fame:** Shelley's poem, *Ozymandias* illustrates the fleeting nature of human power and achievements despite grand efforts for remembrance.
- 5. Impact on Others:** Some Christians are remembered for the impact they've had by passing on the message of Christ, but even they might be forgotten or overlooked in the history books.

Bible Reflection

Read Psalm 103:13-18

Context: *In this great Psalm of praise, King David highlights and celebrates God's mercy, compassion and steadfast love.*

- ¹³ As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.
¹⁵ **The life of mortals is like grass,
they flourish like a flower of the field;**
¹⁶ **the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more.**
¹⁷ **But from everlasting to everlasting
the Lord's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children –**
¹⁸ with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.

Exploring the Passage

- What is the analogy in verse 13 and how does it help us to relate to God?
- What does the imagery in verses 14-16 evoke? Is this a positive or negative view of humanity?
- What does verse 17 suggest about the relationship between God and His people?
- What do you think the repeated phrase, “those who fear him” (verse 13 and verse 17) means? Does this contrast with other descriptions of God in the passage?
- In a world where many seek to be remembered through achievements, how does this passage offer a different perspective on what truly lasts?
- How might God’s eternal love and faithfulness provide comfort to those facing their own mortality?

Further Discussion

- How do you think people might remember you? Do you feel pressure to leave a lasting legacy? Might thinking about your eulogy change the way you live?
- Jesus said, *“store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:20-21). How might this change our attitude towards leaving a legacy?

TRANSHUMANISM

Opening Discussion

- How do you define being human? What qualities or attributes make someone fully human?
- How might society's increasing reliance on technology shape our understanding of life and death?
- **Watch the video:** *Transhumanism with John Lennox*

Session Overview

1. **What is Transhumanism?** - Transhumanism is the use of advanced technologies to modify and enhance human abilities, including attempts to eliminate aging and potentially achieve immortality. It involves radical re-engineering of bodies and minds.
2. **The Scope and Ambition** - Transhumanism isn't just about curing diseases or extending healthy life spans; it seeks to create 'superhumans' or god-like beings.
3. **Ethical and Philosophical Concerns** - What happens when

enhancement crosses over into complete human redesign? Questions emerge about future generations. Will they remain truly human or become artefacts created by a select elite?

- 4. Historical Warnings** - Past attempts to create 'superhumans,' such as Nazi eugenics and Soviet experiments, illustrate the catastrophic consequences of unchecked scientific ambitions without ethical grounding.
- 5. Theological Perspective** - Interestingly, the term 'transhumanism' originated in Dante's *Paradiso*, referring to a hope rooted in resurrection rather than technological advancement.

Bible Reflection

Read Psalm 139:13-16

Context: *Psalm 139 celebrates God's involvement in human creation. It is a deeply reflective, heartfelt Psalm by David that marvels at God's complete knowledge of, and presence with every person.*

- ¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
- ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
and its place remembers it no more.
- ¹⁶ **Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your
book before one of them came to be.**

Exploring the Passage

- Verse 13 uses the phrase “knit me together in my mother’s womb.” What does this suggest about God’s care and involvement in human life from its very beginning?
- Verse 16 mentions that God has ordained every day of a person’s life. How might this idea challenge common modern views about control over our own lives?
- Transhumanism seeks to eliminate aging and extend human capabilities through technology. How might the biblical message of being “fearfully and wonderfully made” (verse 14) clash with or complement these ambitions?
- How does the idea of God’s detailed knowledge of us before birth affect conversations around identity and self-worth?
- In a society obsessed with physical perfection and enhancement, how can Psalm 139 shape how we see our own bodies and limitations?
- How might trusting that God has ‘ordained all our days’ help us approach the uncertainty and fears about aging, death, or technological changes?

Further Discussion

- Is technology a tool to serve humanity, or is it becoming a force that redefines what it means to be human?
- Can the pursuit of advanced technologies designed to radically extend human life or enhance physical and mental abilities sit alongside Christianity?

OPTIMISTIC NIHILISM

Opening Discussion

- Do you think it is possible to have hope or joy without believing in an afterlife? Why or why not?
- If the universe has no ultimate meaning, can we still create meaning for ourselves? What might that look like?
- **Watch the video:** *Optimistic Nihilism with Sara Stevenson*

Session Overview

- 1. What is Nihilism and Optimistic Nihilism?** Nihilism asserts that the universe is ultimately meaningless. Optimistic nihilism, however, finds freedom in this lack of cosmic meaning, allowing individuals to create their own purpose and joy.
- 2. Positive View of Human Progress:** Optimistic nihilism often aligns with humanism, emphasising humanity's capacity for kindness, progress, and ethical living, despite the absence of divine oversight.

- 3. Focus on Legacy and Long-Term Impact:** Many optimistic nihilists are motivated by long-term goals, such as environmental stewardship and leaving the world better for future generations.
- 4. Freedom from External Constraints:** Without belief in divine judgment or an afterlife, optimistic nihilists claim an increased sense of freedom to craft their own ethical frameworks and pursue happiness on their own terms.

Bible Reflection

Read Ecclesiastes 3:10-14

Context: *Ecclesiastes explores themes of meaning, purpose, and human effort in the face of life's uncertainties. The teacher is writing to describe the apparent meaninglessness of living in a fallen world.*

¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race.

¹¹ **He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.**

¹² I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. ¹³ That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil – this is the gift of God.

¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure for ever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.

Exploring the Passage

- What does it mean that God has “set eternity in the human heart” (verse 11)? How does this idea relate to our desire for purpose and permanence?
- How does the acknowledgment of both ‘beauty’ and ‘burden’ in life (verse 10-11) reflect the human experience, whether one believes in God or not?
- How does the statement that “everything God does will endure forever” (verse 14) contrast with the optimistic nihilist’s view of temporary achievements?
- If you are seeking meaning in life, where do you currently look for it? How might the idea of eternity affect that search?
- What difference do you think it makes to our sense of freedom to accept that this life is a ‘gift of God’ vs. ours to shape and control?

Further Discussion

- Where do you find meaning and purpose in life around you? Do you think our relationships and experience are sufficient in creating fulfilment and happiness in this life?
- How may having a worldview that says, ‘nothing really matters in the long run’ affect how you deal with challenges, setbacks or even concerns about the future?
- Do you think optimistic nihilism is optimistic?

REINCARNATION

Opening Discussion

- What cultural or personal ideas come to mind when you hear the term reincarnation? Is this concept familiar to you?
- Do you think the idea of coming back in another form after death offers hope or creates uncertainty? Why?
- **Watch the video:** *Reincarnation with Rahil Patel*

Session Overview

1. **What is Reincarnation?** In Hinduism, reincarnation (samsara) is the belief that the Atma (self) moves into another body after death based on one's karma—the accumulation of good and bad deeds.
2. **Karma and Rebirth:** Karma determines whether a person comes back in a favourable or unfavourable life form. A human life is considered a unique and valuable opportunity for spiritual growth.

- 3. Cultural Practices:** Hindus traditionally cremate the body, believing it helps hasten the transition of the self to its next form or spiritual state.
- 4. Moksha as the Ultimate Goal:** The ultimate goal for Hindus is liberation (moksha) from the cycle of birth and rebirth, leading to unity with God or merging into the divine.
- 5. The Practical and Emotional Impact:** While reincarnation provides a framework for understanding life and death, it also brings uncertainty and anxiety about whether one's good deeds outweigh the bad. There is no guarantee of a favourable next life.

Bible Reflection

Read Hebrews 9:27-28

Context: *This passage observes the finality of human life and death while highlighting the unique, once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ to bring rescue from wrongdoing and eternal life. The Jews had the sacrificial system, where an animal's blood would symbolically take away guilt. The book of Hebrews argues that Jesus fulfils the patterns of the Old Testament. Christians believe that Jesus paid the penalty of sin when he died on the cross, setting them free from paying it themselves.*

²⁷ **Just as people are destined to die once**, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Exploring the Passage

- What does the statement “destined to die once” suggest about the finality of life according to the Bible?
- How does this verse challenge or affirm ideas about moral responsibility and divine judgment?
- In what ways might belief in reincarnation alleviate or intensify the fear of death?
- How does the sacrifice of Jesus (verse 28) affect ideas of repetitive or cyclical spiritual concepts like reincarnation?
- How does the hope of a ‘final liberation’ in Hinduism compare to the Christian hope of resurrection and eternal life?
- What hope does this passage offer to those who may fear death or believe in repeated rebirths to perfect themselves?

Further Discussion

- How can the idea of grace and forgiveness offer reassurance in a world where people often feel burdened by guilt and failure?
- How does your view of what happens after death influence your current decisions and priorities?

LONGEVITY

Opening Discussion

- What lengths would you go to, to stay young-looking or to elongate your life?
- Why do you think so many people are interested in living longer or staying youthful?
- **Watch the video:** *Longevity with Alanzo Paul*

Session Overview

1. **Longevity and Human Desire:** The modern fascination with living longer is palpable, particularly in places like gyms, where every rep and set can feel like a quest to extend youth and vitality. Many seek self-worth and fulfilment through appearance, fitness routines, and technological solutions.
2. **Cultural and Psychological Pressures:** Influencers, media, and beauty industries fuel this drive by promoting unrealistic standards of

youth and vitality. The fear of aging and the desire to delay death often lead to obsessive behaviours.

- 3. The Limitations of Longevity:** Physical beauty and health are temporary; satisfaction based solely on appearance or strength is fleeting. The 'finish line' of being enough is always shifting, creating an endless cycle of dissatisfaction.
- 4. A Different Perspective:** If life is purely material and finite, perhaps these struggles are simply inevitable. However, if there is a Creator who values us regardless of appearance or achievement, this changes everything.

Bible Reflection

Read Psalm 90:10-12

Context: Said to be written by Moses, Psalm 90 is one of the Bible's oldest Psalms. It was likely written during Israel's wilderness journey and therefore reflects the hardships of a wandering people, Moses' awareness of human mortality, and his plea for God's guidance and mercy in uncertain times.

- ¹⁰ Our days may come to seventy years;
or eighty, if our strength endures.
yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,
for they quickly pass, and we fly away.
- ¹¹ If only we knew the power of your anger!
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.
- ¹² **Teach us to number our days
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.**

Exploring the Passage

- What does this passage suggest about the typical human lifespan (verse 10)?
- How does the psalmist describe even the longest life on earth?
- Why might it be wise to “number our days”?
- How does thinking about the limits of life help someone live meaningfully?
- How might focusing on wisdom, rather than simply trying to live longer, shape your priorities?
- How might this passage offer hope to someone concerned about aging or death?

Further Discussion

- Where do you see evidence of the ‘fear of missing out’ or attempts to deny aging in modern culture? How do you respond to these pressures personally?
- If you could live 150 or even 200 years, would you want to? Why or why not?

RESURRECTION

Opening Discussion

- What would it mean to you to live forever?
- If you have a life that does not end, what would you hope it looks like?

Throughout this series, we've explored how humanity strives for meaning and long life through scientific advancements, health, body modification - even the pursuit of immortality.

However, none of these approaches provide a complete or lasting solution to the problem of death.

- **Watch the video:** *Resurrection with N.T. Wright*

Session Overview

1. **The Resurrection of Jesus:** This is presented as a pivotal moment in history, not just as a miraculous event, but as a demonstration of God's power over death.
2. **Why Does It Matter?:** Without the resurrection, Christianity has no foundation (1 Corinthians 15:17).
3. **The Uniqueness of Resurrection:** Unlike ancient myths or philosophical speculations, the Bible claims the resurrection of Jesus

really happened. It is seen to be a historical, verifiable event that offers hope for all of humanity.

4. The Promise of the Resurrection: Jesus' resurrection promises both a restored relationship with God and the hope of a future bodily resurrection for those who follow him. This isn't just life continuing as it is — it's about a new creation where death, pain, and suffering are defeated.

5. Hope Beyond the Grave:

- For sceptics, the resurrection invites exploration: What if this extraordinary claim is true?
- For Christians, it is a reminder that faith is not merely about 'going to heaven' but participating in God's restoration of creation.

Bible Reflection

Read 1 Peter 1:3-5

Context: Taken from a letter written by the apostle Peter to early Christians who were facing persecution by the Roman Empire. This is a letter of encouragement to believers who were scattered across different regions, urging them to remain steadfast in their faith, and remember the hope of the resurrection.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy **he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,** ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

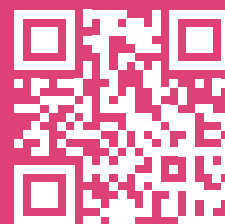
Exploring the Passage

- What does Peter mean by “new birth into a living hope” (verse 3)?
- How is this hope connected to Jesus’ resurrection?
- In verse 4, what is the inheritance that is being described?
- How does knowing this inheritance “can never perish, spoil, or fade” affect you? How is it different from an earthly inheritance?
- How does the resurrection challenge or affirm your view of life and death?
- What questions do you still have about the resurrection and its implications?

Further Discussion

- Reflecting on this series, how do the promises of the resurrection compare to the solutions offered by other worldviews such as being remembered, transhumanism, or reincarnation?
- In what ways does the promise of resurrection offer something fundamentally different from simply extending life indefinitely?
- If true, what difference will the resurrection of Jesus make to you today?

For more information about the resurrection, and other big questions about life and faith, please visit our website: **theocca.org**





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