

Visit Tyndale's exciting Web site at www.tyndale.com.

Why Believe? Exploring the Honest Questions of Seekers

Copyright © 1995 by Greg Laurie. All rights reserved.

Cover photo copyright © 2001 by John Lamb/Getty Images. All rights reserved.

Designed by Dean H. Renninger

Edited by Susan Taylor

Published in 1995 as *Life. Any Questions?* by Word, Inc.

First Tyndale printing 2002

Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Laurie, Greg.

[Life, any questions?]

Why believe? : exploring the honest questions of seekers / Greg Laurie.

p. cm.

Originally published: Life, any questions? Dallas : Word Pub., c1995.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8423-5581-2

1. Apologetics. 2. Spiritual life—Christianity. 3. United States—Religion—1960-I. Title.

BT1103 .L38 2002

239—dc21

2001001990

Printed in the United States of America

08 07 06 05 04 03 02

8 7 6 5 4 3 2

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	
Why Am I Empty?.....	1
CHAPTER 2	
Why Am I Lonely?	17
CHAPTER 3	
Why Am I Afraid?	35
CHAPTER 4	
Why Am I Here?	51
CHAPTER 5	
What Happens When I Die?.....	71
CHAPTER 6	
What Does Jesus' Cross Mean to Me? ...	95
CHAPTER 7	
Why Do I Feel Guilty?	115
CHAPTER 8	
How Do I Receive Forgiveness?	143
CHAPTER 9	
What Now?	165

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	VII
INTRODUCTION	IX
o o o o o	
NOTES.....	183
NOTE TO THE READER: THE NEXT STEP	185
ABOUT THE AUTHOR.	187

WHY AM I EMPTY?

CHAPTER 1

It was 2:10 P.M. on a muggy July day in suburban Tacoma, Washington, when Mike Kenyon sat down in his orange easy chair and stared down the business end of an L.A.R. Grizzly semiautomatic.

The alcohol, the drugs, the lies, the infidelities were too much for the beleaguered auto mechanic to bear. He wanted to end it all—stop the pain. He pulled halfway back on the four-pound trigger. Then, not really sure why, he put the gun down, turned on the television, and began flipping through the channels. For some reason he stopped channel surfing when he heard my voice and saw me addressing a crowd 1,175 miles away at Anaheim Stadium.

Mike said later that it was as if I were talking just to him that day. He listened as I told the Anaheim crowd that I knew the reality of emptiness, could recall how lonely and painful my own life had been at one time, and could offer a solution to all that hurt, loneliness, guilt, and emptiness. Instead of blowing his brains across the room, Mike Kenyon found the solu-

tion he was really searching for that hot July afternoon and took the necessary steps to fill the void in his life.



How about you? Have you ever been tempted to just cash the whole thing in? Have you ever been torn up inside by a feeling of emptiness? Do you wonder if life has any meaning? Have you ever felt like giving up? There is a solution. It's tried and true. It's guaranteed. It doesn't cost anything, as Mike Kenyon and millions of other fulfilled and happy people around the world have discovered. It's the only cure for one of the world's most commonplace maladies: Emptiness. All of us have experienced it—from the most famous to the completely unknown. We don't all reach the limits that Mike Kenyon reached. Few of us ever get that desperate. But we all know the feeling. It makes no difference whether we're a world leader, Hollywood celebrity, rock star, or a brilliant scientist. That gnawing emptiness can eat away at the soul. It plagues the lifestyles of the "rich and famous" just as surely as the lifestyles of the "poor and unknown."

Emptiness and loneliness are not unique to this generation. Nor were they unique to my generation . . . or the generation before . . . or the generation before that. Nor will they be unique to the next generation and the one following. Every generation has complained of feeling empty because every person is born with an essential emptiness inside—a deep longing for spiritual meaning—an inner vacuum that can only be filled by one thing.

It feels as if there's a hole inside us big enough to drive a

truck through. So we follow countless pursuits in our frantic efforts to fill it up. What we want is some sense of purpose and meaning in our lives. We start shoving things into that hole, trying to fill it, stop its aching, close the distance . . . make ourselves happy. What will do the job? Money? Beauty? Fame?

“A Hole in My Life,” a song by the Police, might be the anthem of our times.

A one-time leading Hollywood actress told *USA Today*: “It sounds so trendy, California . . . but I believe a lot of us feel a kind of hole in our heart—an unfocused ache that’s fixed by some people eating too much, . . . others with freebase. In my case, I’m a romantic junkie.”¹

Actor Nicolas Cage echoed those ideas: “I wonder if there’s a hole in the soul of my generation. We’ve inherited the American dream, but where do we take it? It’s not just about cars and wealth. It has to do with freedom. We’ll fight for freedom, but are we free in our thoughts, or are we paralyzed by our dreams of consumption?”

Harrison Ford, the most successful actor in the history of Hollywood whose movies have grossed two billion dollars, told a magazine interviewer: “You only want what you ain’t got.”

What ain’t he got? “Peace” was his response.²

Media mogul Ted Turner described life as being “like a B-grade movie. You don’t want to leave in the middle, but you don’t want to see it again.” That’s a sad commentary on life from one of the world’s most successful men.

We sometimes think that if only we had money and fame, we would be happy. If only we could be rich—like Aristotle Onassis—but it was his daughter, Christina, who said, “Happiness is not based on money, and the greatest proof of

that is my family.” Shortly after making that statement, Christina Onassis died of heart failure reportedly as a result of years of abusing tranquilizers and diet pills.

People have long been trying to fill the emptiness in their lives with things. One of the most popular ways has been with drugs. The list is long of those whose lives ended prematurely due to drug use. So many sixties icons have checked out early. The list just goes on and on: People such as Jerry Garcia—lead guitarist, singer, and founding member of the sixties rock group the Grateful Dead—dead at fifty-three of a heart attack after long years of widely publicized heroin addiction. Garcia was for many a living link to the sixties. Thousands of “Dead Heads” would follow the band’s concert circuit across the nation in celebration of the culture and philosophy of that bygone era. Garcia, however, had tried to kick drugs more than once; he had been in and out of drug rehab centers for years.

LSD guru Timothy Leary tried to comfort mourning Dead Heads with a nineties spin on his sixties axiom: “Turn on, tune in, drop out.”

“Hang on, hang in, hang out!” Leary advised bereaved Dead Heads.

Jerry Garcia was one in a long line of successful rock and rollers and Hollywood multimillionaires caught in the sixties whose lives ended tragically:

- Rolling Stone Brian Jones, twenty-five—dead from a drug-related drowning
- Keith Moon, thirty-one, drummer for the Who—dead of an overdose

- Sid Vicious, twenty-one, of the Sex Pistols—dead of a heroin overdose
- Elvis Presley, forty-two, the “King of Rock ’N Roll”—dead of heart failure due to drugs

Add to the list rock icons Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Jim Morrison, comedian John Belushi, and actor River Phoenix. This list is by no means complete; it is just a sample of the many lives tragically ended due to drugs. And still drug use continues to spread.

Or take the example of Kurt Cobain, the leader of the platinum-selling rock band Nirvana. He made a career by singing about confusion and frustration. Then one day at the age of twenty-seven, Kurt Cobain took out a shotgun and killed himself in his Seattle home. Ironically, he was only a year younger than Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix when they died.

Here was a man who had so much. He had success. He had fame. Yet his life was empty—so empty, in fact, that he had begun killing himself with a heroin addiction long before he finally pulled that shotgun trigger. Cobain reportedly wanted to title one of his albums “I Hate Myself and I Want to Die.” In his suicide note he wrote: “I must be one of those narcissists who only appreciate things when they are alone. I’m too sensitive. I haven’t felt the excitement for too many years now.”³

WE SOMETIMES
THINK THAT IF ONLY
WE HAD MONEY
AND FAME, WE
WOULD BE HAPPY.
IF ONLY WE
COULD BE RICH—
LIKE ARISTOTLE
OR NASSIS.

His mother was quoted in a newspaper saying, “Now he is gone and has joined the stupid club.” Referring to other rock stars, such as Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin, who died young, she said, “I told him not to join the stupid club.”⁴

Courtney Love, the widow of Kurt Cobain, said in an interview that appeared in *Rolling Stone* magazine, “I don’t think God necessarily put us here to be sober all the time, but I also don’t think he put us here to be junkies.”⁵

Reflecting on Cobain’s death, John Carlson wrote: “In a sense, Cobain is what the spirit of the sixties once envisioned: complete freedom from social, moral, or political constraint, almost universal license to compose and explore whatever landscape he chose, liberation from middle America and its traditional values.”⁶ No boundaries. No sets of absolutes. And so Cobain’s life came to a tragic end. Clearly, there’s more to life than economics—than material possessions.

Shortly after Cobain’s death, former president Bill Clinton had his infamous encounter with MTV. A young person in that audience raised the issue of Cobain’s death. The seventeen-year-old made this statement about her own generation: “It seems to me that Kurt Cobain’s recent suicide exemplified the emptiness that many in our generation feel.”

Pop icon Madonna was asked the question “Are you a happy person?” She replied, “I’m a tormented person. I have a lot of demons I’m wrestling with. But I want to be happy. I have moments of happiness. I’m working toward knowing myself, and I’m assuming that will bring me happiness.”⁷

Apparently fame does not necessarily equate with happiness, as another cultural icon will readily testify. “I feel

something's missing," successful actor-comedian Eddie Murphy told *People* magazine. "I don't think there's anyone who feels like there isn't something missing in their life. No matter how much money you make, or how many cars or houses you have, or how many people you make happy, life isn't perfect for anybody."⁸

Another Hollywood celebrity discovered that fame and fortune couldn't fill that empty spot deep inside his soul: "I found that I couldn't shove enough drugs, women, cars, stereos, houses, stardom in there to make me feel good. I guess that's why a lot of people overdose—they get to the point where the hole is so big they die."

One of the most successful entertainers ever is Cher. She is now in her fifties. On growing older Cher said, "I hate my fifties. . . . I never felt older until I hit fifty." She is now building a fourteen-thousand-square-foot, seven-bedroom house overlooking the ocean in Malibu. "When you turn this age, possibilities have become probabilities, certainties," she says. "You've been there, done that: bought the T-shirt, got the poster, been the poster. You have to figure out new, creative ways to stay vital, interested, have new dreams. Maybe next time I'll come back as a cowboy. Maybe next time I'll do better."⁹ There's that emptiness again.

Comedian and actor Jim Carrey has certainly had his share of success. His films have grossed millions, and he is one of the higher-paid actors in Hollywood today. A journalist who interviewed Carrey noted, "There's a perception in show business that all comedians are really clowns crying on the inside. And Carrey insists it's true." The journalist wrote: "There is something almost disarming about how up-front Carrey is

about past bouts with depression, self-loathing, and even his self-medication through marijuana.” Elaborating on some of his bleaker moments, Carrey says, “You have to go through your periods where you cry and sob and scream. I’ve gone on little personal vacations where I’ll go away all by myself and sit and curse at the TV for the whole weekend.”¹⁰ I guess even really funny people can be really sad.

Jonathan David, of the rock band KORN, was on MTV holding and kissing a bottle of PROZAC and was quoted as saying, “This is my best friend. I don’t know true happiness. I’m not a happy person. I play like it. I act like it a lot. But inside, actually I’m really not that happy.”

It’s not just the fast lane of Hollywood stardom that leaves this void in people. It touches even world leaders. At the pinnacle of his career as president of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos wrote: “I am president. I am the most powerful man in the Philippines. All that I have dreamt of, I have. But I feel a discontent.”

That feeling of discontent, restlessness, and disappointment plagued J. Robert Oppenheimer, the director of the Los Alamos, New Mexico, research team for the Manhattan Project, which produced the atom bomb. When asked about his achievements a year before he died in 1966, he replied, “I am a complete failure! They leave on the tongue only the taste of ashes.”

All of us have something we live for—some passion, some ideal that drives us. Otherwise, we’re not really living, just existing. We all hope when our lives are over that we will have been more than just a statistic—a few lines on the obituary page.

What is your master passion right now? What do you live for? What is it that you think about constantly? What is it that you dream about—long for? What is it that moves you? What is your reason for living?

This is an especially important question for young people to consider. Whatever one's master passion, it is certain to affect the years to come. It will influence the direction one's life will take.

If we were to take stock of the lives of some of those around us, examine their priorities, and look at what they dream about, think about, wish for, it would often come down to a desire to accumulate wealth and property. Few admit it.

But some people do admit it. We've all heard the saying He who dies with the most toys wins. That's the motto of some people today. To them, life is just a big high-stakes game. But the problem with this mind-set is that there is never enough—the drive to accumulate more always overshadows the ability to enjoy what has already been accumulated!

It reminds me of a particularly great Christmas when I was a little boy. I really took in a fantastic haul that year. I was so happy with all of the presents that I had received—until I went to visit my friend. He got something I didn't get. I even remember what it was—a plastic scuba diving figure that would move its fins back and forth when placed in water. For some reason back then it seemed to be the greatest thing I had

ALL OF US HAVE
SOMETHING WE
LIVE FOR—SOME
PASSION, SOME
IDEAL THAT
DRIVES US.

ever seen in my life. All my other new toys seemed comparatively meaningless after seeing this fabulous object of my desire. Immediately, I started bugging my mom to get me this toy—on top of everything else I had just received.

But we outgrow those bouts of covetousness when we get older—don't we? Not necessarily. No matter how old we get, we still experience that feeling.

You're happy with your car. It's the greatest. It performs so well. And then your friend gets the next new model—one that's more powerful with a few more upgrades. Suddenly your car just doesn't make you happy anymore.

The same principle applies to other areas of life. We start looking at our friend's husband or wife and think, *Wow, I wish I could trade my husband in on him*, or, *Boy, I wish I was married to her*.

This materialistic and lustful nature isn't a problem only among the affluent. Some people have very little but are actually more materialistic by nature than those who have managed to accumulate many possessions. You can't judge people's hearts by the size of their estates. You may look at someone who drives a luxury automobile and lives in a sprawling estate and decide that that person is very materialistic.

That may or may not be true. Someone with nothing who dreams about material possessions all the time may be more materialistic than the person behind the gate of that magnificent estate. Some people spend all their time dreaming and never manage to accumulate anything. Those who spend excessive amounts on the lottery hoping for the big win are often more materialistic than the guy who works hard for the money to support his family.

One of the wealthiest men who ever lived was King Solomon. In his quest for fulfillment and the meaning of life, he accumulated a vast number of possessions. One day he looked at all he owned—probably everything his eye could see, from beautiful orchards to elaborate edifices. After surveying his great wealth, he said, “Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure. . . . Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done. . . . And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind” (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11).



Some people live for pleasure. This is not a new idea. The pleasure mania we see in the United States today—the hedonism—is not unique to this generation. Caesar Nero, the emperor of Rome, believed the pursuit of pleasure was what life was all about: To live was to be like an unbridled animal in pleasure, passion, and partying. That’s the way Nero saw things. That’s the way he lived—for pleasure, passion, and parties.

Things haven’t really changed much since then. Every generation thinks they have some new outlook on life or a new purpose. But, as Solomon said, history merely repeats itself. Nothing under the sun is truly new; it has all been said or done before: “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Generation after generation, humanity has bought into the same old lies and empty pursuits.

King Solomon, who had known his own share of pleasure mania, said to himself, “Come now, I will test you with

mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure'; but surely, this also was vanity. I said of laughter—'Madness!'; and of mirth, 'What does it accomplish?'" (Ecclesiastes 2:1-2).

Maybe you don't live for pleasure. Maybe you live to acquire knowledge. Now, getting a good education is a wonderful objective—a noble pursuit. A great first-century philosopher by the name of Seneca said, "Life is to enjoy oneself in the realm of ideas. To think. To learn. To master the laws of nature and make the mind the master of man." That sounds good. But is it enough? Can't this pursuit, too, lead to a dead end?

Solomon followed this path as well. Not only was he one of the wealthiest men who ever lived, he was also one of the wisest. He was renowned worldwide for his wisdom. Here is what he said about the realm of ideas: "'Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge.' . . . I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:16-17).

Solomon isn't saying that the pursuit of knowledge is wrong—only that if we neglect God in the process, it will be an empty and futile search.



Maybe you're one of those people who just lives to be happy. Lots of people appear to be doing this today. If you ask them what they are living for, they will say, "Happiness." But, if you ask them what happiness is, they're not able to readily define it.

What is happiness? I don't know—but I'm looking for it.

British novelist William Boyd says, “We all want to be happy, and we’re all going to die. . . . You might say these are the only two unchallengeably true facts that apply to every human being on the planet.”¹¹

Happiness is an elusive thing. I’m not even sure what it is. Is it an emotion? a feeling? a sense of well-being? Maybe it’s one of those qualities that people can’t define but everyone recognizes readily when they encounter it.

Philosopher Eric Hoffer wrote: “The search for happiness is one of the chief sources of unhappiness.”

Maybe you’re like Madonna—searching for happiness by trying to get to know yourself better. If so, you may wind up very disappointed. In fact, the more you get to know yourself, the more disappointed you may become. Why? Because the Bible tells us, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). Every person was born with a sinful nature.

We often hear people saying that they need to “find themselves.” But that statement is exactly contrary to what the Bible instructs us to do. Jesus said, “You need to lose yourself.”

He said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 16:24-25). In other words, forget about yourself.

We find what we are looking for, not by seeking it, but by seeking God. We don’t find life and happiness by seeking those things. We find life and happiness by seeking God, not our inner selves.

Maybe that's one of the reasons so many marriages fall apart today. Too many people enter into marriage unprepared to give, filled with only the expectation of getting. "What's in it for me?" Our modern-day heroes—our icons—provide the worst examples for our culture. It seems that every day we read in the newspapers that another Hollywood marriage is falling apart. Some of them last only weeks or months.

ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES, TRUE HAPPINESS IS NEVER SOMETHING THAT SHOULD BE SOUGHT DIRECTLY. IT IS ALWAYS THE RESULT OF SEEKING SOMETHING ELSE.

I once heard a story about a distraught and unhappy man who went to see a counselor in search of help and direction. Evaluating the miserable condition of this young man, the counselor said, "Forget about all those things. Go and see the comedian who is performing at the local comedy club. I hear he is keeping everyone in stitches. Go listen to him, and you will forget about all your troubles." There was a moment of silence, and then the cli-

ent groaned, "I am that comedian!"

Clearly, the world's version of happiness is vastly different than God's version. The happiness of this world is dependent upon things happening. It hinges on things going well. If I am in good health, the bills are paid, and I am feeling fine, then perhaps I am happy today. But if something goes wrong, if someone cuts me off on the freeway, or if I get a cold or something worse, suddenly I am unhappy.

But the Bible gives a completely different view of this elusive thing called happiness. According to the Scriptures, true happiness is never something that should be sought directly. It is always the result of seeking something else. Think about it. When we are trying to be happy—trying to be fulfilled—we rarely are. But when we forget about those things and get back to the purpose for which God placed us on this earth, we find the wonderful by-product of happiness. That's when our lives find their proper balance.

Apart from Jesus Christ, everyone is spiritually destitute. Regardless of education, accomplishments, or religious knowledge, all are empty without God. And most of us have a hard time admitting this fact. It's hard for us to acknowledge our need to reach out to God.



Dramatic changes took place in the life of Mike Kenyon once he made his peace with God. Some of the changes that followed his decision included the restoration of his marriage and a reconciliation with his father from whom he had been estranged for years. Those who know Mike Kenyon have stated that his transformation has been nothing short of miraculous.

Mike Kenyon says he no longer has an empty hole inside. The hurt is gone, and so are the drugs and alcohol. He reports that he doesn't miss anything about his old lifestyle.

Was it a miracle that saved him that hot July day when he pressed that gun to his head and began to pull the trigger? Yes, it was a miracle. Mike Kenyon was saved by the grace of God.

When he visited California, he handed me the bullet that was in the chamber of the gun he had pressed to his temple that summer day in 1993. I've kept it as a constant reminder of God's power to transform people's lives. This kind of miraculous transformation is available to everyone. It happened to me at the age of seventeen. It can happen to you, too.