

ENDORSEMENT

This book appeals to me because Don gives biblical wisdom for daily Christian living. He starts with assured salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and then explains such principles as how to function according to God's laws of love; grow into a spiritually mature Christian; experience the Spirit's power; defeat the devil, and live successfully for God in one's family, job and church. Don is realistic about the challenges of Christian living in "this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). His broad base of knowledge and experience enables him to put the plug of God's truth into the socket of human need. If you want to understand the meaning of love, boost your spiritual life, and know how to help others live wisely in Christ, this book is for you.

—Henry W. Holloman,
*Th.D., professor emeritus of systematic theology,
Talbot School of Theology, Biola University*

THE MEANING OF LIFE

Instruction and Counsel for God's People

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DON ASHCRAFT



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DEDICATION



To those who want to find a better way to live their lives,
and have more joyful and harmonious relationships.

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Preface

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?

IF ASKED ABOUT their versions of the meaning of life, many people give statements that show confusion and emptiness. Almost none refer to God.

Because they don't know the meaning of life, many people have broken relationships, broken communication skills, broken hearts, and broken lives. Most people don't have the relationship skills needed to develop meaningful, satisfying relationships. That is why so many families have problems and are failing today. Some people substitute attention for relationship. But, this does not provide a meaningful life. Depression and loneliness are caused by lack of a meaningful relationship, or a hurtful relationship, or boredom with life.

You cannot understand the meaning of life unless you know God's plan for your life as found in the Bible. Jesus said in Matthew 22:40, "On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets" (God's entire written Word). Do you know what these two commandments are? If you don't know these two commandments and understand them, you cannot understand the Bible and find God's plan for your life. You cannot understand the meaning of life.

Living by God's laws of love brings meaning into our lives. The Bible, God's book, gives knowledge and guidance to solve virtually every relationship problem we face. It gives us insight to bring meaning into our lives and relationships. Ultimately, a relationship with God through Jesus Christ is essential to understand the true meaning of life because God created this universe and all life. Through the Bible and the principles of this book, you can discover how to have a relationship with the God

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who made you and loves you. You can discover how to relate to people in peaceful, satisfying, meaningful ways—especially members of your family.

This book:

- ◆ Explains God’s plan for your life;
- ◆ Provides practical applications of the Bible to our everyday lives;
- ◆ Gives guidance from the Bible for developing meaningful relationships;
- ◆ Teaches you to communicate in a way that heals broken relationships;
- ◆ Provides principles for raising children God’s way.

I wrote this book for you—

- To *astound* you about what is happening in the world today and how it correlates with the Bible;
- To show why a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is *essential* for a fulfilled life;
- To lift up God, and His laws of love, that guide us in our relationships and our families, and bring us joy and fulfillment when we *practice* them;
- To *instruct* you and *counsel* you in God’s ways of life so you will be more successful in your relationships and gain more meaning and value for your life;
- To expose Satan in all his ugliness for who he is and what he is doing to get control of the entire world, including you and me *personally*;
- To equip you to understand God’s saving message of love and forgiveness simply and clearly for yourself, and to explain it to someone else who does not know it or understand it;
- To defend the faith as absolute truth with clear, simple evidence for those who don’t understand it, or those who reject it and hold a different belief;
- To terrify you about these things so you will *never* turn from your relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

So, prepare for an adventure.

What is the Meaning of Life?

Let me ask you:

- Do you believe the Bible is truly, truly the Word of God?
- Do you believe you are going to heaven when you die?
- Can you explain *why* you believe this?
- Can you put God's message of love and forgiveness into words?
- Do you know God's message well enough to explain it to someone else?
- Can you tell others *why* you believe this and give them clear evidence?
- Is the Christian faith really *real* to you?
- Can you explain God's laws of love and how to apply them in *your* relationships?
- If you cannot put your beliefs into words, do you really know *what* you believe?
- If you cannot put into words *what* you believe and *why*, are you really sure you have actually accepted God's offer of forgiveness and are going to heaven when you die?

If these questions trouble you, this book will help you settle them in your heart and mind. Chapter one gives crucial knowledge about the faith many Christians have trouble putting into words. Chapter two gives *clear evidence* that this universe, and all life, were created by God who lives outside this universe; and the Bible is the *only* book authenticated both naturally and supernaturally as God's book.

The other chapters of this book give guidance—for living a godly life according to God's laws of love—for protecting yourself from Satan's lies—for understanding and applying God's principles of relationship in your family—and why this is important for your joy and fulfillment.

Let's Begin with One, Two, and You

The very first verse in the Bible says "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Do you believe God created *everything* including you and me? That question is for *you*. If you have any question or doubt God created everything, read chapter two. That will

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give you clear evidence that there is *no* way to explain the existence of this universe and life except as the work of a powerful, living God who designed and created everything out of nothing. It will equip you to defend this belief to nonbelievers. Become familiar with chapter two so you can quote it or explain it to nonbelievers. If you need to, you can read it to them.

Chapter one begins with a question: “Do you know where you will go when this life is over?” That question is for *you*. Think about yourself. Do you just *think* or *hope* you are going to heaven? Most people say they think they are good enough for heaven. Most people hope they have done enough good things to qualify them for heaven. Is that what you think? If you do, you need to know that is *not* what the Bible says. Continue reading chapter one to see what the Bible actually says. This will give you knowledge and understanding of the message of God’s love and forgiveness you need to know for yourself. And it will equip you to explain it to someone else.

Chapters three through thirteen give you very important information about living by God’s laws of love, about Satan our enemy, and about how to raise children God’s way. *This could change your life*. So, please read these chapters carefully and thoughtfully, and see how it can help *you*.

Chapter One

GOD'S MESSAGE OF LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

May I ask you a question?

Do you know where you will go when this life is over?

The Bible tells us God loves the people He created—you and me—and wants to have a *relationship* with us. He wants to help us and guide us through our lives, and then take us to heaven when we die.

But, something is standing in the way, called *sin*—*our sin*. Romans 3:23 from the Bible says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” God says, *you* have sinned; *I* have sinned.

What are sins?

Sins are crimes we commit against God, our Maker. Our fatal crime is not listening to God—not believing God—not doing what God says. God gives us His laws, through the Bible, to show us the way He wants us to live. These are laws of *love* that guide us in our relationships with God, with other people, and with our own inner selves.

God's way is *far better* than our way. But we naturally turn from God to go our own way and follow our *feelings* instead. But, our feelings *deceive* us, and lead us into trouble—away from God. If we don't do what God says—and that's what sin is—God cannot help us. Our sin separates us from God. And our separation from God is *sin*.

God will not allow sin or sinners into His heaven because sin causes evil, and sadness, and pain. These are things God hates and will not allow into His heaven. So, we—as *sinner*s—cannot receive God's help, and cannot enter God's heaven.

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God says in Ezekiel 18:4, “Behold, all souls are mine. The soul that sins shall die.” You see, God is life—the *only* source of life. We are His by creation. When we reject our source of life, we die. By rejecting God, our sin separates us from God, and His love, and His life—*forever*. So, we will die.

Does this make sense?

That’s the *bad* news. Now, here’s the *good* news.

The Good News

God still loves us and wants to save us from this death. So, He has provided a way for us to be forgiven. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”—for you—and for me.

But who is Jesus? And why did He die for us?

Jesus is God’s own Son who lives in heaven with God. God sent Him to this earth over 2000 years ago to be born into human flesh through a special birth in Bethlehem near Jerusalem. That was the first Christmas. God sent Him to teach us more about God, about His love, and about His way for us to live. And, God sent Him to die on a cross for us. He took our place in death for our sins—so we don’t have to die for our own sins. He set us free by dying *for us*. *He paid our penalty*. Jesus loves you enough to die for you.

He was taken from the cross and buried. After three days, God raised Him bodily from the dead. That’s what Easter is.

Jesus Christ defeated death for us.

He returned to heaven, and is waiting for us to come to Him by faith in Him. Because of what Jesus did for us, we can now be forgiven and receive eternal life in heaven.

But only those who turn to God from their sins—and receive Jesus Christ as the payment for their sins—will be forgiven. John 1:12-13 says, “But, to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born, not of a natural birth, nor of a human decision, or a man’s will—but born of God.” Those who receive Jesus and believe in Him become a child of God. That’s why we call God, “our *Father*.”

You can become connected to God in the closest personal relationship there is—a parent-child relationship. God loves His children.

God's Message of Love and Forgiveness

God's love is much bigger and better than a *human* father's love. If you put God first in your life—and follow His way for your life—He will give you a new life. He can bring peace into a troubled heart if you let Him. I know this is true. I have experienced it.

In John 11:25-26, Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.” Your physical body *will* die some day. But, if you believe in Jesus—and trust Him to save you—the real you inside your body will be given a new kind of body in heaven that will never grow old and *never die*.

What will heaven be like? There is no pain, sickness, or death there. Evil will be totally destroyed. God makes everything *beautiful*.

Every person who comes to God by receiving God's Son, Jesus Christ, as the payment for his or her sins, will be forgiven. He will be received into heaven with *joy* for *eternity*.

Receiving God's Love and Forgiveness

[Insert name] God offers His gifts to *everyone*—including you. Are you ready to receive God's love and forgiveness—and accept Jesus Christ as the payment for your sins—and have eternal life in heaven?

[“Yes.”] Then, are you ready to pray, and ask God to come into your heart and life, and *forgive* you, and take you to heaven when you die?

[“Yes.”]

- [If you are reading this to another person:] Okay. Let's pray. Repeat after me.
- [If you are reading this to yourself:] Now, say the following words out loud as your prayer.

[“You guide me.”] Okay. But, think carefully about the words before you say them to be sure you really mean them. If you have any questions or doubts, let's stop and talk about it first. Let's pray. Repeat after me.

Dear Father in heaven, — I know I am guilty of sin in my life. — I acknowledge and confess I am a sinner. — Thank you for loving me — and accepting me — and sending Jesus Christ to die for me. — Please forgive me — and take me to heaven when I die. — I now receive Jesus Christ as the payment for my sins. — And I now receive Him as the Lord of my life — to help me — and guide me through my life. — Please come into my heart and life — and make me into the kind of person you want me to be.

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Now, while we are still praying, let me ask you this. Did you *really mean* what you prayed?

[“Yes.”] That’s wonderful! Now, I want to pray *for you*.

Father in heaven, I am so glad [name] has accepted what you have offered to him [or her]. Please help him realize you have forgiven him through his faith in Jesus Christ, and he is now your child forever. Help him grow in his knowledge and understanding of you and your will for his life. Help him to seek you, and follow you, and learn to go *your way*. [Now, pray for a need of your friend.] Thank you, in Jesus’ precious name. Amen.

[Insert name], according to God’s promise and your own testimony, you have become a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. I’m so glad for you. You now have a *relationship* with the living God who gave you *life*. You now have a heavenly *Father* who genuinely loves you. He will live in you, and help you, and guide you through the struggles of life. Do you have any questions?

Two Important Words

John 3:16 is the most quoted verse in the Bible. It says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” This gives you confirmation God loves you, and has forgiven you. Following Jesus will improve your life. You now have a secure place in heaven through your faith in Jesus.

Now, because you have become a follower of Jesus, two words here are very important for you. They are *love* and *forgiveness*. God has given His love and forgiveness to you. Now, God wants you to carry these two words forward into your life by giving your love and forgiveness to others.

God’s Kind of Love

In John 13:34, Jesus said: “A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” God’s kind of love is a giving and forgiving kind of love—an action, not a feeling—although feelings will follow your actions. When you do

God's Message of Love and Forgiveness

something good for another person from your heart, you are expressing God's kind of love. You see, God designed us to receive the greatest joy, fulfillment, and physical and emotional health from giving and forgiving—not from getting—and certainly *not* from hurting someone to get what you want.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is the second word that's important. The Bible says in Colossians 3:12-13:

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other, and, if one has a complaint against another, forgive each other. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Is there someone who has hurt you? Have you forgiven that person?

God says *you must forgive*. God knows unforgiveness hurts you and produces pain, resentment, and guilt in your heart. Unforgiveness actually brings illness, both physical and emotional. Forgiveness in obedience to God brings healing and sets you free. That is why God calls unforgiveness sin. But in 1 John 1:9 it says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Do you think you could bring yourself to forgive that person?

Now, is there someone you need to ask to forgive *you*—someone you hurt? If there is, go to that person and say, "I have come to apologize. I was wrong when I [fill in your own words]. I am so sorry. Will you forgive me?" Whether or not he or she does, you have obeyed God. Leave it to God to work it out. Admitting you were wrong, at least in part, is essential to resolve a hurting or broken relationship.

[Insert name], now that you have become a follower of Jesus, is there something in your life you need to *change*—something you know is not right—something that is sin in God's eyes? If there is, God will help you make that change. Ask Him.

Then resist every temptation to do sin and don't ever give in. Don't let anyone deceive you that sin brings pleasure and profit. They hide the ultimate consequences of sin. In 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 we read,

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“Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

One More Thing

[Insert name], there is one more thing for you to do. It is baptism. Do you know what baptism is? Baptism means to dip or be immersed. For the Christian, it is to be immersed into water by the help of a follower of Jesus, usually the pastor of a church. When you go down into the water, it represents dying to your old, selfish nature. When you come up out of the water, it represents being resurrected to a new life in God through Jesus Christ. You are proclaiming you are now a follower of Jesus. When Jesus was teaching, His disciples baptized those who came to faith in Him (John 4:1-3).

Is this something you would like to do to show you are a new person in Christ?

Now, can you tell me why God will let you into His heaven?

“Jesus died for me so I can be forgiven. I have accepted Him and I believe in Him. I am following Him because He gave me eternal life. I am a member of God’s family by my faith in Jesus. He will take me to heaven when I die.”

Ten Guidelines that Make a Follower of Jesus Strong

When you follow these guidelines you will be strengthened to grow in your knowledge and understanding of God and His will for you.

1. Pray and ask God to reveal Himself to you and His will for you, and to guide you when you need help.
2. Read the Bible and see what God says to *you*.
3. Memorize and meditate on God’s Word, and He will give you understanding. He will teach you how to think, and how to live, and how to build better relationships.

God's Message of Love and Forgiveness

4. Take God seriously to do what He says. Be obedient to God your Father. He genuinely loves you and wants to help you.
5. Make God's way your way in all your ways, and He will guide you. Give up all known sin in your life. Make a list of what is causing you pain. Give your pain to God. Surrender them all to God, and He will help you.
6. Practice freely giving love and forgiveness to others, as God has freely given love and forgiveness to you.
 - Avoid these toxic Cs: criticizing, condemning, and complaining.
 - Keep your anger under control. Read the book of James.
 - Give unfailing kindness to others, as God commands: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).
7. When you face difficulties (and you will), ask God to help you.
8. Thank God every day for what He has done for you. A spirit of gratitude toward God and toward others will energize you and bring joy to your heart. Write down what God is doing in your life and thank God.
9. Tell others what Jesus has done for you. Brag on Jesus.
10. Become involved in a local community of followers of Jesus. Some churches do not truly follow Jesus. Find one that does.

Read the Bible for Yourself to Learn God's Way of Life

- Read these books first to learn more about Jesus, His teachings, and what He has done for you: Matthew through John in the New Testament. But don't get bogged down in the genealogies.
- Read the beginnings of Jesus' Church in the book of Acts.
- Read the apostle Paul's letters explaining God's plan for us through Jesus Christ: Romans through Hebrews.
- Read God's letter of love to His children who follow Jesus in 1 John.
- Read the remaining books of the New Testament to complete the story of Jesus.

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- Read Psalms to receive God's instruction and encouragement.
- Read Proverbs to receive God's wisdom for everyday life. Read the chapter number corresponding to each day of the month. Repeat until you have read through Proverbs several times. But don't neglect reading Matthew through John to learn more about Jesus. These readings will change your life.
- Read the Old Testament beginning with Genesis to learn about God's dealings with mankind from the beginning.

I have found reading through each book of the Bible in one sitting opened my eyes to things I never saw before. Things were in context. It was enlightening and encouraging. I suggest you do this to open your eyes to what God has for *you*. Start with the New Testament. Set aside periods of time to read each book in one sitting, no more than one book per day. Make notes of what you learn. It will give you an *amazing* understanding of Jesus and God the Father, their love, what they *did* for us, and what they *want* for us.