

Since Life is So Futile, Should I Believe God Cares?

It is best to call things plainly as they are. Many of the basic claims of Christianity are not only the most difficult to explain, but also the most embarrassing.

A Christian writer, however, has the duty to explain Christianity, not explain it away.

There is one claim in particular that many Christians find terribly embarrassing: Christianity makes the remarkable claim to not only solve the problem of futility, but also to cause it.

Christianity teaches that the whole world has been subjected to futility (synonyms: frustration, vanity, and meaninglessness) by God. He has done this with the hope of liberating us from our bondage to decay, and bringing us into the fold of God's children.

It is the Christian view that if man could find even a trace of meaning in any earthly pursuit apart from God, he would take it. We saw in an earlier chapter how Solomon pursued every possible earthly avenue to find meaning and happiness independent of God, and came up empty.

Christianity teaches that God causes every system that seeks meaning and happiness apart from him to end in futility, while at the same time teaching this futility is considered a "grace" or kindness from God. In other words, failing was for Solomon's benefit.

Christianity teaches that God makes us feel the weight of futility in every worldly pursuit—getting the big promotion, making the big bucks, living in the big house or getting none of those things. He makes us so miserable through futility

that we choose him of our own free will. He sovereignly removes any possibility of meaning except in him. We might put it this way: Futility is the chief tool by which a good God sovereignly draws us to himself of our own free will.

The Christian system teaches that God will not force a man to revere him, but he will make it impossible for a man to be happy unless he does. Solomon said it this way: "I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him." (Eccl. 3:14)

Even if we get exactly what we want, we will still not be happy apart from God. Apart from God, life has no meaning. That's the deal. I am just reporting, don't shoot me.

Futility is Protection

Christianity goes one step further and states that if you had gotten what you wanted you would have destroyed yourself, and your failure to get it is God's grace and kindness. Personally, I spent my twenties and thirties working and praying to achieve a type of success that I now realize would have destroyed me, and then was disappointed when I was spared.

Ken worked for a Fortune 100 company for eleven years. A star, he wanted the brass ring, and he put in the 70 hours a week required to get it. He was also a deacon in his church. Ken met once a week with a man in an accountability group. In his hunger for worldly success, Ken became so busy that his accountability partner was driving Ken's son to Little League games. One day he told Ken, "You need to do something about your life. Your son is starting to be closer to me than to you." It woke him up.

Men are interested in goal success; God is interested in soul success. Would we really want to get what we want if we knew it would be our undoing? Of course not. An all-knowing, all-

wise, all-good God actually protects us from disasters we would bring on ourselves.

The Bible contains passages that further explain why bad may not be so bad after all.

“But by means of their suffering, he rescues those who suffer. For he gets their attention through adversity. ... Be on guard! Turn back from evil, for it was to prevent you from getting into a life of evil that God sent this suffering” (Job 36:15, 21, NLT)

“For the creation was subjected to frustration (*futility, vanity, meaninglessness*), not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom. 8:20-21, NIV, *emphasis added*).

God is love. Christianity explains that while we work and pray for things that would destroy us, a loving God—like a loving parent—graciously slows us down. We may wish he would just leave us alone, but as C. S. Lewis noted, that would not be asking for more love, but less.

We Are Easily Deceived

We are made in such a way that we want to lead a comfortable, happy, meaningful life. We also are made in such a way that we think we know the best way to pull that off. Sin deceives us, and we leave God out of our systems.

To change, you have to become uncomfortable with something. Christianity states that God loves us so much that he will never let us become comfortable in the world. He does this by removing the possibility of finding any meaning apart from him.

So what’s the bottom line? If God did not introduce futility into our lives and make us uncomfortable, nothing would ever

change. Christianity never claims futility is good, but that God uses it for good. Futility sets in when your system fails. It leads you to despair. Despair leads you to the leap. Futility is the grace of God that allows us to be disturbed out of complacency and error.

The Grace of an Untamable God

By this point you may be thinking, "This is a brutal system to get men to become Christians. It is, in one sense. It is brutal for a surgeon to amputate a gangrenous leg, but he does so to save the rest of the body. In the same way, Christianity is a gracious system designed to save us from ourselves.

When I was a teenager, I tried to tame my parents. I couldn't. Then I tried to tame my brothers, and failed. Next, I tried to tame my teachers. No dice. I quit high school. My dad escorted me down to the Army enlistment office. I couldn't tame my dad.

Then I married and tried to tame my wife. I couldn't tame my wife, either. Next, we had children and I tried to tame them too, but I couldn't. Then I became a Christian and, following the pattern, I tried to tame God.

And God is an untamable God. He just will not allow Himself to be tamed. If we didn't try to tame God, he wouldn't have to tame us.

Is there any doubt that men think they can tame God? Is there any doubt that they will fail?

We are being sought by an untamable God. He is the immovable rock dropped in your path. He loves you so much that he will brutalize you, if he must, so that you will choose him of your own free will. That's why the worldly, moral and religious systems don't work. Life becomes futile when we try to tame God.

Abundance, Not Comfort

In the Christian system, God desires men to lead an abundant

life. Men often mistake abundant for comfortable.

Someone has told the story about a farmer and his son clearing a field together over a couple of weeks. They placed the brush in a pile, and after a few days birds came and started to build nests. When the farmer chased the birds away, his son thought he was extremely cruel.

At the end of two weeks the field was cleared, and the farmer set the pile of brush to flames. Only then did his son see that what he had at first thought was an act of cruelty was actually an act of kindness. This world is not our home. Someday the world will come to an end. God doesn't want us to get too comfortable here.

Everyone experiences futility. But remember that futility is the love of God that restrains a man from ruining his life of his own free will.

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Editor's Note: This article is adapted from chapter nine of Patrick Morley's 2001 book, *Coming Back to God*. The book is a helpful evangelistic tool for prodigals, cultural Christians, and men who have become jaded about Christianity, but would perhaps respond if someone would take their honest doubts and questions seriously. *Coming Back* to was written for men who have given the best years of their lives to a "system" that has failed them.

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