WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?
Program 174
Living As Slaves to Our Bodies
by Ernest O'Neill

How were our personalities meant to work originally? That's the sub-topic we're discussing at this time each day on this program. The main topic is, "What is the meaning of life?", or "Why are you here? Why am I here?" We've sorted our way in the past eight or nine months through a great deal of the intellectual reasoning connected with the premise that we are here because a Supreme Being, that is intelligent and personal, created us.

He created us to be His friends and that's why you are actually in existence. That's why there is such order and design in your life. That's why your eyes are able to photograph objects so fast and relate them to your brain. That's why there is so much evidence of construction and design and purpose in the universe. It was created by a Supreme Being, who is as intelligent, indeed more intelligent, than we are and is certainly as personable as we are in order to make us as persons.

When we began to look for evidence that He had expressed Himself somewhere in our world, we of course were driven to that amazing phenomenon in the first century; that man that was unlike all the other great religious leaders in that He had power to destroy death. We discovered that His life had none of the usual imbalance of the psychotics who claim they were God's Son, or claim they're Napoleon or somebody else. It had, instead, great balance and integration -- so much so that we often look at His life as the perfect life.

So, we began to study what this man Jesus of Nazareth said was the explanation of reality and what His explanation for the way we were made amounts to. We began to discover that, of course,

the Creator had made us with the same capacities as Himself, and we have actually drawn those out for clarity on a page, if you aren't sitting in the car and aren't in danger of hitting the guy in front of you if you miss the brakes. If you're at home, then do divide a page into three sections.

In the top section, put the word "body"; in the second section, put the word "soul" and in the bottom section, put the word "spirit". There you have the outline of the three levels of life that the Creator has given us: the physical level (our bodies), the soul (which comes from the Greek word "psuche", which is "psyche" in English and means psychological or the psychological part of us: our mind, emotions and will), and the spirit (which is the innermost part of us; the very essence of you is your spirit).

You, when you are alone, constrained by nothing except the external -- that you are and nothing else, one of the old classical writers has said. So, we were meant, of course, to operate from the bottom of the page up, but we don't. We operate from the top of the page down. If you draw an arrow from body down through the soul and spirit that's the way we operate. We are influenced by what comes through our little eyes and that sends a signal to our emotions in our soul. Our emotions are either pleased or depressed at that.

They send a signal to our mind, which in turn manipulates whatever circumstances or people or things we need manipulated, in order to get the right response through our bodies. So we operate usually on that level. If you go downstairs in the morning to the kitchen to get breakfast, you look out and you see that it is a bright, sunny day. Your little eyes are delighted with that and send a signal to your emotions, "Be happy, be happy." Your emotions send a signal to your mind, "Good Morning". Say, "Good Morning".

Your mind, of course, says "Good Morning" to make your wife or your children feel happy, too. But, it's dreadful. It's a curse if you come down and you look outside and it's thundering and raining and dark and glowering skies, and looks miserable. Your eyes send a signal to your emotions, "It's a bad day. Be gloomy, be sad. This is miserable. Life is about to end. Commit suicide today." You send that signal to your mind and your mind sends a signal to the tongue that goes out to your wife and just groans or grunts at her. No bright, "Good Morning". Just a kind of a grunt, "This is a miserable day."

So, you operate in that vicious little circle between your body and your soul. Most of us live there completely. We never get any deeper than that. We wonder why we have such a sense of emptiness at times, inside where our spirit should be. We wonder at times who we are. We wonder if we're just little robots that respond to external stimuli, like Pavlov's dogs. We can't find any self deep down. I mean, we find plenty of selfishness, but we can't find anything that is US deep down.

Many of us live with a tremendous sense of emptiness all the time right through our lives. It doesn't matter what kind of happiness we try to get from outside, we try to manipulate the circumstances so that we will be happy. Most of us, for instance, have very clear notions of what is a happy day.

Friday is a happy day. We have a phrase in America, "T.G.I.F.", "Thank God It's Friday." When Friday comes up, our eyes notice the date on the calendar and we realize that we are off work at the end of today for a few days. That sends a signal to our emotions, and our emotions say, "Be happy. This is Friday." That sends a signal to our mind. Our mind sends a signal to our tongue to say something nice to your boss. Say something nice to your colleague, "Well, isn't it great that we're off today."

But, Monday morning is an entirely different situation. The eyes look at the calendar and see that it's Monday, think of the darkness of Monday starting school after the weekend. That sends a signal to our emotions and our emotions say, "This is miserable. We have a whole, wretched, horrible week ahead of us. That sends a signal to our minds to say something nasty to the person beside you, "Great day THIS is!" So, you see, the circle goes on.

You notice the interesting thing is that the will is virtually eliminated completely from that circle. Few of us exercise our wills these days. Most of us operate just in a little vicious circle of response-reflex-reactions between the things that we see and the emotions that we feel are a result of those, and the way our mind is stimulated to manipulate those things in our favor. Or the people whose approval or disapproval we receive and the emotions that we feel as a result of that and then the mind's activity in order to gain approval or recognition from them.

Or, in the case of circumstances, the circumstances that we're surrounded with, either vacation or Friday or a game that we're going to see or a television program that we're going to watch or a party that we're going to go to and the emotions of elation or depression, of satisfaction or unhappiness that we feel in response to that and then the mind's action to try to manipulate those circumstances to bring about the appropriate pleasant experience that we actually want.

But usually the will has very little to do with it, and our soul is utterly under the domination of our body. We are virtually little animals. That's why there is an amazing verse in that old book the Bible that says that kind of thing. We were at one time just stimulated by the body and by the soul. Nothing else seemed to affect us, but just our body and our soul. We were actually slaves of those.

If you ever want to look at it, it's near the end of the New Testament in a book called Ephesians in Chapter 2 and verse 3. It says, "Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind." Most of us just follow the desires of body and mind, or body and soul. We never go any deeper than that. We are very dissatisfied with it.

We find that we are the playthings of our feelings. We find we are the playthings of our circumstances. We feel we're the playthings of the possessions that we own. In fact, many of us feel our possessions own us. We joke, you know, that the more possessions you have, the more time you spend maintaining them. We feel we're often the playthings of people's opinion, and we're driven by what people think of us. But we don't seem able to get out of that little, shallow, superficial vicious circle of life that operates between our body and our souls.

The truth is, of course, that our spirits are meant to be alive. They're meant to be alive, but they are dead. Let's look at what is involved in bringing them to life tomorrow.