WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?
Program 208
Our Part in Starting Over
by Ernest O'Neill

During the Second World War, we used to wear identity discs as children. And I suppose it's like the dog tags in the U.S. army. They were little discs with our name and address on them so that, I suppose, if we were lost in an air-raid people would know, at least, who we were. And many of us today wish, at times, we had identity discs. That is, at times we have difficulty with our own identity. We know that to the husband we're a wife. And to the children we're a mother. To one we're a mistress or a housekeeper, to the other we're a kind of nursemaid and teacher.

To our boss we may be a typist or we may be an engineer. To our friends we may be a football player or rugby player. To the man in the bus we may be just another fare that he collects. And so we find ourselves fulfilling all kinds of functions in society, and in a sense being a chameleon in that we turn into what we are expected to be. The problem with many of us now in these days is, we have turned into so many things, and we have become such chameleons that turn into the color of the environment in which it finds itself, that many of us have difficulty in telling who we really are.

You may think that's ridiculous, but great numbers of us nowadays are so busy pleasing other people and doing what others expect us to do and, indeed, doing what we think we have to do to ensure our own safety and security, and our own financial futures, that we have ceased to be ourselves, and some of us, shortly after we get out of school or get out of university, find ourselves in the position where we have lost the sense of who we are. And we don't any longer know who we are or what we would really like to do.

We have spent so much time pleasing our peers, our pals, our friends, the boys at the local, the guys at the pub, the friends we play football with, that we no longer know who we really are inside. And we often would like an identity disc hung round our wrist, if by that we could easily again be the people that we once knew when, perhaps, we were little children and were more innocently ourselves. So, we have been discussing that problem on this program for the past year.

And we have pointed out that the reason we have become such stereotyped robots, and lost the sense of our own identity and individuality is precisely the reason that we mentioned earlier on: that we have come to depend on people and what they think of us to provide our sense of self-worth. And we have come to depend on the stocks and shares, if we have them, or the insurance policy, or the old shekels that come from the job, or the welfare state, or the social security system to provide us with a sense of security.

And we have depended on these things and these people so much now that we are almost slaves to please them. And we have therefore lost the sense of what we would really like to do or what we really think ourselves. We have so long acted in response to the audience's applause. We look at famous people. And we look at people who are in the public eye and are sorry for them, because they always have to be on show. And they always have to say the right thing to their photographers or the reporters. And we think how good that we are not in that position, but really, we know we are.

We have become strange performers that try to please everybody, and have little time to find out what we ourselves actually do think or do feel. Such is the state for the majority of us in the twentieth century that we have given up all hope of

finding out ourselves or discovering ourselves. And we cynically say, "Well, that's what growing up is all about, you know. You can't just do what you think. You can't just say what you believe all the time. You have to keep your mouth closed at times." The problem is that we have kept our mouth closed so often and so long that we've forgotten what we really do think and we feel empty inside.

And that has come about because of our dreadful need to get security from the things around us, and to get a sense of self-worth from the people around us. We, of course, have done that because we have taken a most unrealistic attitude to the existence of the world. We've concluded that the world has come about by blind chance; by an undirected evolutionary process that has come out of the clear blue sky. We know that that's utterly illogical. We know that even if there is an evolutionary process, there had to be someone to program it to progress from the simple to the complex.

We know that, but we take the utterly unrealistic attitude of practical atheism. And we say, "Well, yes, we know there must be somebody back there. But we don't know who it is, and we can't do much about it, and nobody else seems to care too much." So we live as if there is nobody there and therefore, we are our own keeper, and we have to look after ourselves. And that's how we get into this paradoxical situation, where we try to be our own gods. We try to take care of ourselves, and we end up being subject and slave to everybody else for the things that we get or for the people that approve of us.

There is a way to discover ourselves. There is someone who is actually interested in us finding ourselves. There is somebody who is interested in us coming alive inside again. And you have a spirit inside you that is really you. That's what your spirit is. It's the real you. You have a mind and emotions that you have like

the rest of us. It's a reasonable mind or an unreasonable mind, balanced emotions or unbalanced emotions. You have a body that is reasonable, too. But we all share that in common.

But your spirit is just yours. And there is One Person who is interested in bringing that spirit alive, and that is the One who originally gave it to you, the Maker of the world. Because He actually wants you to be His friend. And He wants you to be yourself. And He is able to make that come alive inside you again. However deeply buried it is under all the mess of obligations and habits and customs, and ruts that you have got yourself into in your thinking and your feeling, He is able to dig down into the middle of all that and to make your spirit alive again.

But He does require some things from you. First of all, that you just believe this. You need to start believing that this is so. If you don't believe that it's so, He cannot act inside you. He will not act inside you, because He will not force you against your will to come alive. But if you will begin to believe that He is real, and that He is a Person who loves you and cares about you, and knows you, and wants you to be yourself, and to come alive inside, He is able to bring your spirit alive inside, to make it start all over again, to give you a completely new life.

It's like starting life again. It's like starting it fresh with all the old customs and the old habits destroyed immediately. And it's like a whole new fresh life. It's like becoming a little child again. In fact, that's what His Son said. He said, "Unless you become as a little child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." And it's true. Unless you get back to becoming just a little child, to starting life all over again, you cannot enter into that freshness that you once had. So first of all you have to believe.

The second thing is you have to repent. That means, in Greek (the word is "metanoia") change your mind. Turn your mind around. Stop thinking that there is no Creator. Stop thinking that you're dependent on your peers for your sense of self-esteem. Stop thinking that you are dependent on your stocks and shares for your financial security. And start believing that the Creator, who looks after the stars and the birds and all the animals, also looks after you and will take care of you if you will begin to do what He has put you here to do, on this earth. And that's what it takes. It takes a real attitude of belief in Him, and a real attitude of changing the way you live; no longer depending on people, and beginning to depend on Him. And then you begin to come alive inside.