

Mystery Experiences / What Changes Us

Opening Prayer:

No-one is totally sure who wrote the serenity prayer, although Reinhold Niebuhr is often credited with it. However, some link it with Friedrich Oetinger, an 18th century theologian, whilst others attribute the serenity prayer to the Roman philosopher Boethius, living in the early part of the sixth century.

The prayer was popularised by the A.A. movement, who adopted it at the core of their twelve steps, and had it printed on small cards for members to carry in their wallets.

The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next.

Amen.

Ground Rules

- I hope we now have a degree of trust among the group.
- I almost goes without saying there should be an understanding of confidentiality among all members of the group.
- In rugby club parlance “What happens on tour stays on tour.”
- Tonight, nobody should feel any pressure whatsoever to speak if they do not wish to.

Introduction

Our everyday lives, on the whole, are fairly hum-drum and routine. We get caught up and pre-occupied with the immediate and everyday, and forget to look beyond. It often takes significant events and moments in our lives in order for us to do this; to step back and ask the question: “What is this life of ours all about?” This is a question that has been asked since the time we became intelligent beings:

Psalm 8

A psalm of David.

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
- ² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise [b]
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings [c]
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Significant Events / Moments

- Births
- Deaths
- Marriage
- Sickness
- Accidents
- Land mark birthdays
- Being made unemployed
- Marriage breakdown
- Intense moments of contentment / happiness
- Periods of sadness and depression
- Observing extraordinary natural beauty
- Observing / hearing extraordinary other beauty – e.g. from art and music
- Observing the wonderment of the nature – e.g. David Attenborough's Planet Earth

Mount Everest

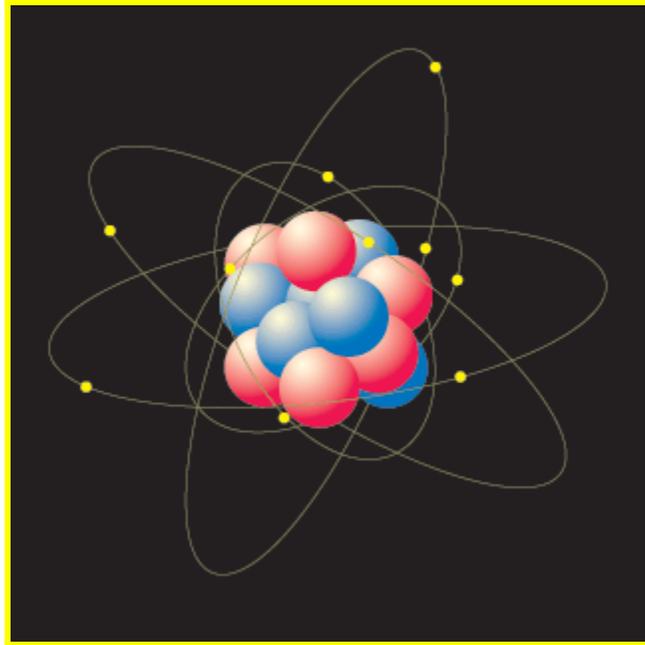


Aurora Australis and iceberg, Antarctica



Photograph © Fred Olivier

bbc.co.uk/planetearth





These extraordinary images of nature only reinforce my belief in God, the Creator of all things.

Our Own Significant Tragic Events / Moments

Such events as these often make us ask: "If there is a God, how could he let such things happen?" People who believe in God and suffer such events can sometimes lose faith and trust in God for a while, or possibly forever. However, in others their faith and trust in God is deepened all the more:

Matthew 8:23-27

Jesus Calms the Storm

²³Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. ²⁴Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.

²⁵The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"

²⁶He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

²⁷The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

Job 1:13-22

13 One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, 14 a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, 15 and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

16 While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

17 While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

18 While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, 19 when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

²⁰ At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship ²¹ and said:

"Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart. [c]
The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;
may the name of the LORD be praised."

²² In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

People with no Faith often see these things as a proof that God does not exist. Ultimately, there are no easy answers. It may be part of the process of looking beyond ourselves. Management, we are told, have to look at the 'wider picture', which informs their actions and decisions. With our limited individual and finite view, things sometimes happen we do not agree with or understand. God has the widest picture of anybody, and at the end of the day, no matter how difficult it might be, we must trust in his providence.

We have all suffered personal sadness and tragedy in one form or other. I have personally been helped by prayer, but also by looking beyond my immediate self. I often try to place things into context, and to realise just how extraordinarily fortunate and blessed I actually am.

Footprints in the Sand - The Poem

by Mary Stevenson

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed
he was walking along the beach with the LORD.

Across the sky flashed scenes from his life.
For each scene he noticed two sets of
footprints in the sand: one belonging
to him, and the other to the LORD.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him,
he looked back at the footprints in the sand.

He noticed that many times along the path of
his life there was only one set of footprints.

He also noticed that it happened at the very
lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he
questioned the LORD about it:

"LORD, you said that once I decided to follow
you, you'd walk with me all the way.
But I have noticed that during the most
troublesome times in my life,
there is only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why when
I needed you most you would leave me."

The LORD replied:

"My son, my precious child,
I love you and I would never leave you.
During your times of trial and suffering,
when you see only one set of footprints,
it was then that I carried you."

Closing Prayers

God our Father, we are surrounded by your wonders and led by the greatness of your plan for us. Your world is a gracious gift filled with love. Give us the eyes to see your hand at work in our daily lives in very ordinary ways and the faith to recognise your guiding hand.

Loving Father, you invite us through your Son, Jesus, to experience the fullness of life. We thank you for the world in which we live. We thank you for the beauty of creation, for the people who have enriched our lives by their love. We thank you for all the stories and life experiences we have shared with each other this evening. We make our prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.