

**DO YOU BELIEVE?**  
A BOOK SERIES FROM RATIO CHRISTI

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# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?

*PARTICIPATING IN THE  
GAME OF LIFE*

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BY KLAUS ISSLER

 RATIO  
CHRISTI

**FAITH & REASON** are at odds in our culture. For many, faith has come to mean little more than wishful thinking and blind belief. Such a concept is completely foreign to the pages of Scripture and historical Christianity. As Edward Feser notes, “In short, reason tells us that there is a God and that he has revealed such-and-such a truth; faith is then a matter of believing what reason has shown God to have revealed. In that sense faith is not only not at odds with reason but is grounded in reason.”

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## INTRODUCTION

Two friends were attending the funeral of a very wealthy acquaintance. One leaned over to the other and asked, “How much did old George leave behind?” The other responded: “All of it.” Ultimately, all of our possessions are not permanent. Oh, we can enjoy them for a while. But in the end, we really do not own a thing, since we can’t take it with us after we die. The Egyptian kings of the past gave a lot of thought to how they would live in the afterlife. Some built glorious tombs—the pyramids, for example—to gather the treasures they hoped to use in the next life. Within the tomb of King Tutankhamen (reigned 1333-23 B.C.) were found clothes, furniture, weapons, a chariot and a number of other objects.<sup>1</sup> But sadly, he never got to use them. All was left behind.

This illustrates that our ideas about what kind of persons we are will influence how we live. Perhaps you never thought about this before; maybe you imagined yourself merely a complex machine? Or maybe you figured your consciousness—your sense of awareness, your thoughts and feelings—to be merely programmable complex reactions comparable to a computer, like in the Matrix, where learning Kung-Fu or how to fly a helicopter is as easy as loading the software into the brain. As geneticist and Nobel Prize laureate Francis Crick claims:

*The Astonishing Hypothesis is that “You,” your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules . . . This hypothesis is so alien to the ideas of most people today that it can truly be called “astonishing.”*<sup>2</sup>

(Of course, if this is true, then Crick’s own book is “no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules”!)

But is this really the case? At the end of life, when our bodies fail and we die, do we just *pass out of existence* and *cease* to exist like a discarded laptop? Is there nothing more to show for our existence?

The major world religions have always taught that life is more than what can be seen, and that life goes on in some way after death. Now, empirical research is catching up and offering a way to validate that people continue to have some kind of consciousness after

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<sup>1</sup> “Tutankhamen,” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul* (NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1994), 3.

death—through the study of “near death experiences” (NDEs).

## CONFIRMATION THAT LIFE GOES ON

The event of death forces further probing about life and the unique features of our human nature. Consider the case of a young girl, Katie, who nearly drowned in a swimming pool. The following report was given by the attending physician based on his personal experience, with other details verified by testimony of medical staff and the family. Katie was resuscitated in the emergency room, although still profoundly comatose, and a CAT scan revealed swollen brain tissue. Furthermore, since a machine maintained her breathing, Dr. Morse estimated Katie had a 10% chance of living. But after three days, she fully recovered. Although Katie’s eyes were closed during the three-day encounter, she could describe accurately details about the emergency room and her medical procedures. In addition, Katie had “followed” the family home and could recount specifics about the evening meal, her father’s reaction to the accident, as well as the specific toys her brother and sister played with.<sup>3</sup>

In an episode presented by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, another young girl experienced an NDE during heart surgery. Afterward, she reported having met her brother although she had not known she had one. Her father revealed later there actually was a brother, but he had died prior to his daughter’s birth.<sup>4</sup> After reviewing accounts of NDE during the 1970s and 1980s, psychology professor John Gibbs concluded, “NDE research would suggest that the mind is sometimes capable at the point near bodily death of functioning without the normal (material) support of the brain and the sensory nervous system.”<sup>5</sup> Even the late atheist philosopher A. J. Ayer, though clinically dead for four minutes, was aware of an “exceedingly bright and also very painful” red light. He concluded that “death does not put an end to consciousness.”<sup>6</sup>

I mention these Near Death Experiences, because there is every reason to suggest that you are going to be around for longer than your physical lifespan, and if that is the case there are a lot of important implications for how we live here and now.

In this booklet we’ll explore the purpose of life and the meaning of being human: who and what we are as human beings. To discover something new or different about our lives or ourselves often requires a fresh point of view, a new lens, and so I will rely heavily on an analogy and refer to it often: the comparison of life with a board game.

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<sup>3</sup> Melvin Morse with Paul Perry, *Closer to the Light: Learning from the Near-Death Experiences of Children* (NY: Random House/Villard, 1990), pp. 3-9, cited in Gary Habermas and J. P. Moreland, *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidence for Immortality* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 163.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Children and Death* (NY: Macmillan/Collier, 1983), p. 208, cited in Habermas and Moreland, *Beyond Death*, 163.

<sup>5</sup> John Gibbs, “Three Perspectives on Tragedy and Suffering: The Relevance of Near-Death Experience Research,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 16 (1988): 26-27. For further reading see J. Steve Miller, *Near-Death Experiences: As Evidence for the Existence of God and Heaven* (Acworth, GA: Wisdom Creek, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> A. J. Ayer, “What I Saw When I Was Dead”—an appendix in Terry Meithe and Antony Flew, *Does God Exist?* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 225.

## PONDERING THE GAME OF LIFE

What's your favorite game? We sure have a lot to choose from today. Besides game-shows, sports games (football, basketball), and video games, you have your traditional card games (Poker, Solitaire) and board games like *Monopoly* or *Pictionary* or *Settlers of Catan*. Think about the games you enjoy most. Why do you like them so much? Some people are fond of games for the social interaction; it's great to be with friends and do something fun together. Or when *team play* is involved, you can feel a bond with your partners as you compete against another team. Maybe it's the *challenge* of the game: Can you improve your skills or earn a better score (or win a few bucks)? Or could it be the *game itself*? Something that distracts your mind away from the concerns of life and cares of the day.

Although we tend to place games in the category of entertainment and recreation, games can have an important educational purpose, as simulations. Throughout history, military leaders have prepared troops for war through training exercises called "war games." In business circles, training and development in fields like leadership and human resources have become an industry of their own. Managers and sales personnel improve such skills as hiring and firing, conflict-resolution, and dealing with sales resistance through a variety of role-playing exercises—*games*. If you want, you can take a second or third chance at enacting that same role-play scenario to try out different techniques—all without losing your job! And that's my point: games have important educational value.

How then might *life* compare to a game? Aren't there certain parallels with a game like *Monopoly*? We play for a while; some buy utilities or railroads; some buy houses and hotels; and eventually some lose a lot of money. But in the end, one person buys up all the property, and then the game is over and all game pieces are returned to the box. Similarly in life, each receives certain pieces of equipment to play with, during our four score and ten years on this earth. Then, at death, we leave behind whatever we have accumulated.

## LIFE IS MORE THAN A GAME

Don't misunderstand me. I'm *not* saying that life is *only* a game. But there are some interesting points of contact that are especially instructive: they help us see things we may have overlooked. Most games have at least these features that we'll be exploring in the following chapters:

- *place* to play (Chapter 1),
- *pieces* to play with (Chapter 2),
- *play* and rules of the game (Chapter 3),
- *purpose* of the game (Chapter 4),
- *powerpack* required for continuous play (Chapter 5), and
- *points* for winning the game of life (Chapters 6)

## CHAPTER 1

# A PLACE TO PLAY

Every game requires some kind of set up involving a place to play and what pieces we play with. For a card game, all you need is a deck of cards and a flat surface. *Monopoly* is a little more complicated. The person designated as banker gives each player \$1,500 to start playing: two \$500's; two \$100's, two \$50's, six \$20's, five \$10's, five \$5's and five \$1's. "Chance" and "Community Chest" cards fit on their spot on the board. The player designated as the realtor arranges the property cards according to color for purchase during the game. Each player selects a playing piece and sets it on the game board on the "Go" space. (I prefer to use the "hat" piece.) Then players roll the dice to see who goes first. During the game, whatever number the dice indicate, players move their pieces along the squares, clockwise around the board, doing whatever they're supposed to according to the square they land on. *Table 1* on the opposite page illustrates how three games can be described according to these different categories.

*Chess*, *Monopoly*, and *football* present their own challenges according to the degree of their complexity, chance factors, etc. But for the game of life, the set-up features are far more complicated. Not only must our game board provide the opportunities for movement of play in the game, but it also has to sustain the life of each player while the game is being played! If you're curious about what is involved in sustaining life in outer space, consider the recent report on Life Support Technology Development for Exploration available on the NASA website. It's mind-numbing in complexity. In fact, the extraordinary conditions required for life to emerge—self-sustaining, replicating life—are so improbable, that it's entirely possible we're alone in the universe. To cite one example, in an article recently published in *Forbes* magazine, "The Universe Really Is Fine-Tuned, And Our Existence Is The Proof," the author writes,

*...according to Einstein's General theory of Relativity, the Universe's initial expansion rate and the sum total of all the different forms of matter and energy in the Universe not only need to balance, but they need to balance to more than 20 significant digits. It's like guessing the same 1-to-1,000,000 number as me three times in a row, and then predicting the outcome of 16 consecutive coin-flips immediately afterwards.*

Consider the uniqueness of our gameboard in another respect. In living on earth, we feel like we're on a very large, fixed plot of ground. But actually earth's inhabitants are

	<b>CHESS</b>	<b>MONOPOLY</b>	<b>FOOTBALL</b>
<b>PLACE</b>	Board with 8 by 8 dark and white squares	Square board with movement around perimeter	Large rectangular field 100 yards long; goal posts and end zone at both ends
<b>PLAYER PIECES &amp; TEAMS</b>	16 pieces each: 8 pawns, 2 rooks, 2 knights, 2 bishops, queen and king  <b>Number of Players:</b> 2  <b>Sides:</b> black and white pieces	Each player gets one playing piece on “Go” and \$1,500  <b>Number of Players:</b> 2-6  <b>Sides:</b> none, maybe unofficial “teams” that work together	Football; positions on each team (e.g., back, center, end); uniforms and helmets, pads, etc.;  <b>Number of Players:</b> 11 players per team (offense and defense)  <b>Sides:</b> two teams
<b>PLAY</b>	White usually starts; move pieces on squares according to respective patterns  <b>Skill:</b> An almost all-skill game  <b>Chance:</b> unusual moves of opponent	Move around board clockwise; roll dice to go first  <b>Skill:</b> purchase property and houses or hotels; negotiate with players  <b>Chance:</b> dice roll; cards: (“Chance” and “Community Chest”)	Coin toss; one team kicks ball to start; 4 downs per series; first down after making 10 yards  <b>Skill:</b> Passing, running, receiving, blocking, tackling  <b>Chance:</b> how football bounces, weather, penalties
<b>PURPOSE</b>	To put an opponent’s king piece in checkmate, ready to be captured with no possible way to move and escape.	To become the wealthiest player by making opponents pay you their last dollar after landing multiple times on your properties (or whoever has the most money when the first player goes bankrupt)	Offense: to score the most points (by running, throwing, and kicking the football), and limit the other team’s opportunity to score by retaining “possession of the football” as long as possible;  Defense: to prevent the other team from scoring
<b>POINTS</b>	Points per piece remaining on board; number of moves; final move: checkmate	Amount of money (and assets)	Points for reaching the end zone, extra point, safety, and field goal

Table 1 Game Factors and the Game of Life

hurtling through space at about 66,700 miles an hour, with a rotational speed of about 1,000 miles per hour! Why aren't we thrown off into outer space? Our planet has been engineered in exact size and gravitational pull that we don't even feel like we're on a giant merry-go-round. The earth's location and movement within our solar system permit this whirling globe in space to function as a "stationary" home for us—just like a grand game board. And that particular celestial formula also yields a lot of extras, like alternating days and nights and the variety of our four seasons. When we start thinking about our earth as a game board, we begin to appreciate the genius and elegance of the design. Not only is our world highly functional, its beauty is beyond description, which is quite unique for a gameboard wouldn't you say?

Here I'll propose something we'll explore more fully in the next chapter: that our gameboard is so unique, so exquisitely "tuned" for life to flourish, that a designer—a game master—might be a better explanation for our gameboard than fortuitous chance. Let's keep this idea in the back of our mind, as we consider the uniqueness of human beings as game pieces, in the game of life.





## CHAPTER 2

# PIECES TO PLAY WITH

What kind of playing pieces are we? Human beings evidence a wide range of diversity. We have the same general physical bodies, but these can sure vary in appearance. Some are short, others tall; some thin, some otherwise. Our bodily skin colors differ across a range of color shades; some are black, some brown and some white. We have an assortment of eye colors from dark brown to light blue, and every variation in between. We also came into the world in contexts quite unique: a certain *family*, a certain *country*, a certain *time in history*. Some of us grew up with siblings or as a middle child, or we were adopted or in foster care. Some families were well-off or well-managed while still others eked out a living or were chaotic. Further, our families were part of a distinct culture and spoke one or more languages or dialects, and our country of origin was shaped by certain politics (socialism, democracy, etc.) or perhaps by war, and that country or state was in a certain climate, and the factors go on and on.

*Table 2* on the opposite page illustrates some of these variations for two Nobel Peace Prize awardees. Perhaps you may wish to reflect on your own ancestral givens. How did these factors particularly affect your own life journey?

### HAPPINESS IS . . .

Have you ever thought about how nice it is when something is working well? In America we expect machines and gadgets to work all of the time—that's what they're supposed to do. So when something works well, we don't give it a second thought. Ah, but when it breaks down, only then do we appreciate how valuable a well-functioning machine is.

Consider the most basic of machines, the pencil: the typical one has a #2 lead, encased in yellow-coated wood, perhaps with a pink eraser at one end. You could purchase more expensive varieties, with elegant casings and refillable leads. But what is most important—essential to a pencil's purpose—is the lead component that can leave an erasable mark on paper—a crude word processor, so to speak. Of course, you might use a pencil for other purposes: to open an envelope, punch holes in paper, or use the eraser end to scratch your back. But what's the point (!) of a pencil? To leave a mark.

Well, what's the main point of human nature? What does it mean to function well as a human being? When a person is properly functioning, what does she or he do well? The fount of human philosophy and the humanities was ancient Greece. The Greeks (Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, etc.) had a word for human nature when it is functioning optimally:

	<b>MOTHER TERESA 1910-1997</b> <i>(Agnès Gondza Bojadziu)</i>	<b>MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. 1929-1968</b> <i>(Michael King Jr.)</i>
<b>GENDER</b>	Female	Male
<b>PHYSICAL BODY</b>	Lived for 87 years	Lived 39 years before assassinated
RACE	Albanian	African-American
<b>FAMILY PARENTS</b>	Albanian parents: Nikola (d. 1919) and Dranafle Bojadziu; successful entrepreneur, merchant	Michael and Alberta King ( changed name to Martin Luther King, Sr.) pastor at Ebenezer Baptist church
SIBLINGS	Older brother Lazar and sister Aga	Older sister Christine, younger brother Alfred
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS	Early: wealthy, comfortable life Later: lived with little serving the poor through “Missionaries of Charity”	Middle-class within Southern Black church ministry tradition
CULTURE	Early: Albanian; Catholic Later: Blend East-West cultures; very religiously and ethnically diverse	Segregated South; Progressive National and American Baptist (King mostly attended all-black schools)
LANGUAGE	Albanian (also became fluent in Bengali, English, Serbian, Hindi)	English (eloquent speaker)
<b>COUNTRY</b>	Kolkata, India (in 1929 [age 19] moved to Calcutta, former name)	Atlanta, Georgia United States
POLITICAL SYSTEM	Under British rule until 1947; gained independence 1947, became democratic republic; dense city population, in 1950: 5 million; in 1995: 12 million,	Republican democracy; yet segregation was enforced in the South as legal norm in all public facilities
TOPOGRAPHY/ WEATHER	Port city at sea level within the Ganges Delta; tropical wet and dry climate; avg. temperature 80 degrees	Highest elevation of major cities east of Mississippi River (1,050 ft), sits astride Eastern Continental Divide; humid, sub-tropical climate
<b>TIME IN HISTORY</b>	1910-1997. World War I, 1914-18; World War II, 1939-45  1947 Partition: Hindu-majority India & Muslim-majority Pakistan; large refugee colonies in Kolkata; India has more ethnic & religious groups than most countries, led to various conflicts	1929-1968  Visible leader of U.S. Civil Rights movement from 1955 (age 26) till his death 1968 (age 39), through non-violent protests, boycotts, and marches; Civil Rights legislation enacted in 1964
HONORS: NOBEL PEACE PRIZE	Awarded 1979 (age 69)	Awarded 1964 (age 35)

Table 2 Personal Variations Among Two Nobel Peace Prize Awardees

they called it “happiness” (*eudaimonia*). To the Greeks happiness had to do with human flourishing and thriving not with hedonism or a passing mood. In the following pages, we’ll explore this idea of flourishing: the conditions in which human beings seem to function best. Two things should be helpful to us here: an understanding how we are made and understanding of how we grow and develop.

## HOW WE ARE MADE

The question of how we are made is the question: what constitutes a human person? What are the integral parts of humanness and personhood requiring development? Perhaps the most basic, and therefore most useful inventory of human nature is one suggested by educator Ted Ward. Since it’s a five-fold model, Ward suggests looking at a hand, each finger identifying a key facet of human development, and in moving from thumb to pinkie we move from the most obvious and automated categories of human development, toward the more nuanced (see *Figure 1* on the opposite page).

Starting with the thumb, human physical development is the most obvious and most automated, meaning, as long as we eat, exercise and rest, our bodies will grow toward their adult form. Next, the forefinger, which represents *cognitive* or *intellectual* development. Unlike the body this aspect of the human person requires cultivation. Our schooling system has been established to help nurture our intellectual development to maximize its potential. The more we stretch our minds, the more we can increase our competency.

Next, the middle finger represents the arena of *affective* or *emotional* development. Deryck Sheriffs writes: “Emotions are like colours. The spectrum arranges them in adjacent gradations but they also come in odd mixtures. Emotions are first felt before they can be named. They present themselves with a startling immediacy ahead of our ability to describe them in words.”<sup>7</sup> Development in the affective or emotional area is the on-going process of identifying our feelings and learning to appropriately control, express, and integrate them into our lives.

Next, the fourth or ring finger corresponds to our *social* development, growing in our competency to relate well and nurture intimacy among close friends. In his important book on ethics, the Greek philosopher Aristotle (d. 322 BCE) devoted two chapters out of ten to the topic of friendship.<sup>8</sup> He proposed a three-fold typology of friendship, explaining what *attracts* us about those we tend to relate to more often. The first classification of friendship is based on the enjoyment of *common interests or pleasures*. A second group involves relationships based primarily on *benefits or advantages* that we may receive because of the friendship—a friendship of “usefulness” or “helpfulness.” In Aristotle’s final category, people seek friendship for its own sake, a friendship of *character*, for the sake of the friend alone—not solely for common interests or benefits to be received. These close,

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<sup>7</sup> Deryck Sheriffs, *The Friendship of the Lord: An Old Testament Spirituality* (London: Paternoster, 1996), 211.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J. A. K. Thomson, rev. Hugh Tredennick (London: Penguin, 1976), Books 9 and 10.

intimate friendships typically develop from within either friendships of common interests or friendships of mutual benefit.

“Finally, the pinkie symbolizes the very subtle, but important *moral* dimension of our lives. For example, human nature is designed to be truth-seeking: lying, deceiving, manipulating, etc. typically follow from a lack of courage or integrity to live out something we genuinely value. Or consider justice and fairness: these are simply part of our DNA as moral beings, and those who would deny the truth of these basic moral values are malfunctioning and not flourishing. Their denial flies in the face of the very way we were designed.

Despite the importance of emotional, social, and moral development to the full

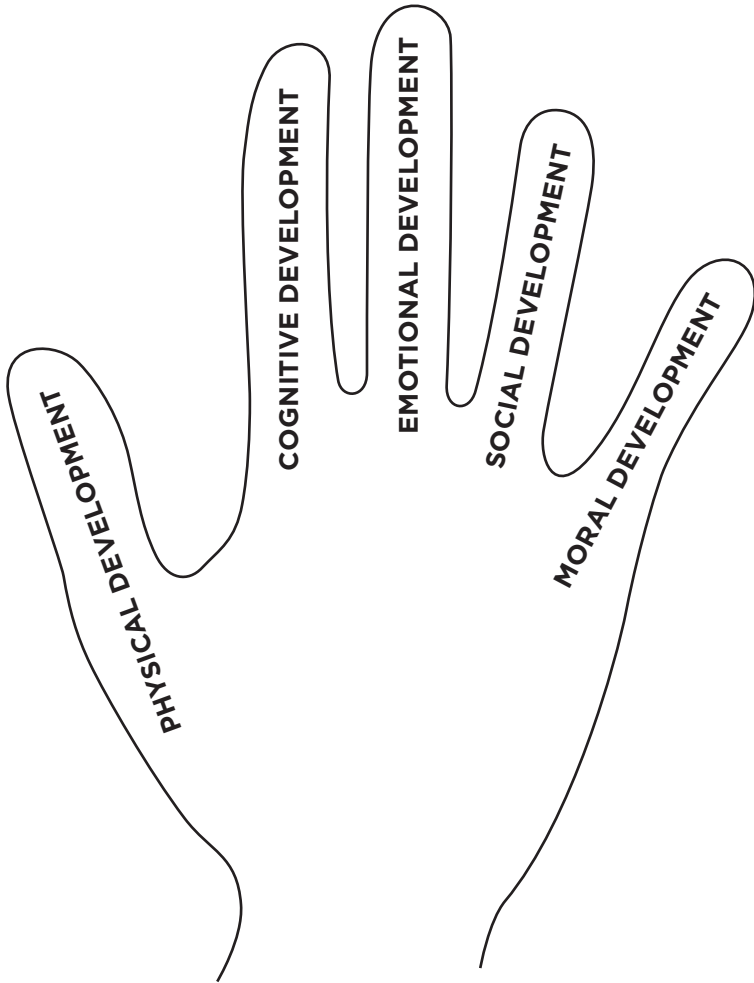


Figure 1: Ward's Hand Model for Human Development

expression of human potential for these important facets of our human potentiality, we do not mature at some automatic rate toward adult maturity, as is the case with our physical development. Therefore, we must give attention and effort to grow up, and these lead us to our second model, focused on the cultivation of emotional, social, and moral development.

## THEMES OF FLOURISHING

Based on his study of human functioning, Erik Erikson (d. 1994), professor at Yale and University of California,<sup>9</sup> suggested there are eight psychosocial stages or "crises" through which all humans must progress toward maturity over our lifetime. For each stage, the particular crisis is represented by a positive or healthy characteristic and a negative characteristic. Without resolution in a particular stage, continuing problems hamper maturation at later stages as indicated by the negative characteristic. (Note: The age categories in parentheses are *general ranges* when the crisis normally occurs).

- *Trust or Mistrust (infancy)*  
When parents offer support and care, the infant will learn it is a safe and caring world.
- *Autonomy or Shame and Doubt (toddlerhood)*  
By doing things by themselves, children will develop a measure of independence.
- *Initiative or Guilt (preschool)*  
Under the guidance of parents, a child will expand his or her experiences of the world and continue to do so.
- *Industry or Inferiority (school age)*  
By experiencing various successful accomplishments, the child will develop a positive self-image or self-concept.
- *Identity or Role Confusion (adolescence)*  
The teen's "identity crisis" is the most critical one to pass through toward adult maturity: Who am I? What roles can I successfully play in life?
- *Intimacy or (Emotional and Social) Isolation (early adulthood)*  
Primarily through marriage, but also with friends, the young adult grows in a number of ways toward healthy maturity.
- *Generativity or Stagnation and Self-centeredness (middle adulthood; 30-65 years of age)*  
This is the longest stage in which people either learn to make their contribution to society, or turn inward to pursue their own selfish agendas.
- *Integrity or Despair and Regret (later adulthood, retirement)*  
One can either look back over how life was lived with a general sense of satisfaction and accomplishment or with one of deep regret and despair.

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<sup>9</sup> Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (NY: W. W. Norton, 1963); *The Life Cycle Completed: A Review* (N.Y.: W. W. Norton, 1982).

This grid may prompt some inner reflections as to how well you may be navigating these psychosocial crises of life.

Another way to conceive of these common crises is as themes that recur throughout our life, across the whole lifespan. By clustering the positive and negative characteristics according to related concepts, three themes of human flourishing emerge:

- *Relationships and Community*  
Trust or Mistrust (infancy)  
Intimacy or (Social and Emotional) Isolation (early adulthood)
- *Responsibilities and Vocation*  
Initiative or Guilt (preschool)  
Industry or Inferiority (school age)
- *Renewal and Character Formation*  
Autonomy or Shame and Doubt (toddler-hood)  
Identity or Role Confusion (adolescence)  
Integrity or Despair and Regret (later adulthood)

*Figure 2* on the next page depicts these three themes as a circle (or donut) with permeable boundaries suggesting that each theme affects the maturation of the other areas.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, by portraying these categories in a circle, certain “tensions” can be identified at the *boundaries of each area* that highlight continuing conflicts that we must attend to throughout life:

- Focus on Task/Focus on People
- Focus on Work/Focus on Renewal
- Focus on Others/Focus on Self

As we’ll see later, this “donut” needs to be filled in further and properly unified in the center. However, in our human relationships, character, vocation, etc., we’ll be better equipped to go through the game of life if we attend to and work through these “tensions.”

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**10** Taken from Klaus Issler, *Wasting Time With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 136.

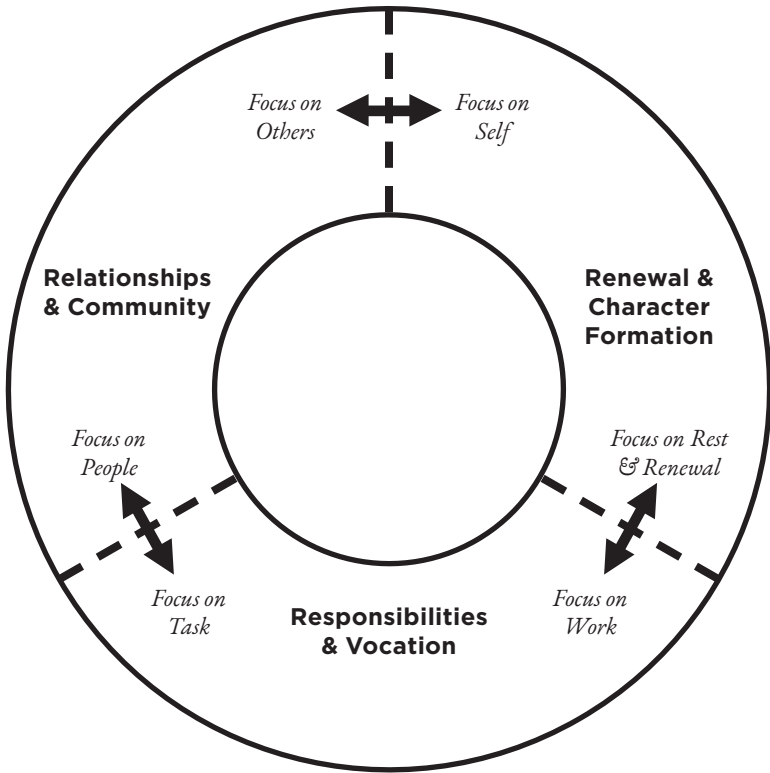


Figure 2: Three Themes of Human Development





## CHAPTER 3

# PLAY AND THE RULES OF THE GAME

Within the rules of play for every game, there is a certain mix of *skill* and *chance* factors built into the game to make it competitive, fair, and fun. The skill factors include what is in our control—the differing levels of abilities each player exercises in the game. And whatever a player cannot control represents all the chance factors. In *Monopoly*, the major chance ingredient is how the dice roll: you may land on someone's property, get sent to jail, or inherit a windfall by landing on Chance. Skill in playing *Monopoly* primarily relates to knowing when to buy properties and hotels and how well you can negotiate with other players. Chess may be the best example of an all-skill game. Very little is left to chance, except maybe who starts first.

Skill and chance factors are also a part of the game of life: *A few* things are in our control, but *most* of life is not. No matter how much we try to stay in control of the direction of our lives, we can't escape life's "chance" factors. We can't avoid what others may do to us. And we don't know when an accident may happen or natural disaster may strike. Life has a mix of skill and chance factors. Along the way, we're handed a number of surprises and twists, and the key is how we *respond*.

It's also worth noting that, unlike *Monopoly* where each player starts with \$200, in the game of life some have more opportunities, resources, and a head start on everyone else. When games seem unfair or slanted toward one of the players there are ways to "level the playing field." One way is "handicapping": either give some kind of *advantage* to the novice, or have the more skilled player carry a *disadvantage* into the game. In a sense, we do this with children. They usually aren't expected to play by adult rules: there are lesser expectations, lesser responsibilities, and considerably more leniency for breaking the rules. In life, fairness is not so easily mitigated, corrected, or resolved. While there is no getting around this fact of unfairness, it should give us compassion for other players and make us reticent to critique the performance of others.

## RULES FOR THE GAME OF LIFE

All games have a set of rules to guide play. What about the game of life? Common ways of "winning" seem to revolve around a few key goals: accumulating more money and possessions, gaining more power and influence, or acquiring more fame and notoriety. While goals are few, the strategies are endless: building alliances, working overtime, self-promotion, eliminating competition, etc. But if this was all that was involved in

winning the game of life, would it be worth winning? Are the rules for life merely the rules of the jungle, favoring the strong, the ruthless, and the cunning? As we are unique from every other creature on the planet, I want to suggest that the human rulebook includes things not found in the rules for the jungle.

To me, as a Christian theist, this suggestion seems obvious because I see humans as a unique creation of God; it follows logically that there would be a unique set of instructions. Yet, for those who see human beings as just another variant on the evolutionary tree, what other rulebook is there except survival of the fittest? That's how Bertrand Russell, the twentieth century's most infamous atheist, viewed the world.

*...man is the product of causes that had no prevision of the end they were achieving. That his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves, his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms. That no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave. That all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspirations, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievements must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins.*<sup>11</sup>

Russell's view of life and of humanity is not merely unfortunate, it's inevitable if we see ourselves as only the product of blind processes and random mutations. Meaning, purpose, value, virtue, beauty, goodness, truth—these would all be arbitrary pages in made-up rulebook.

There isn't the space here to compare and assess the worldview of Russell (naturalism) and my own (Christian theism), but I would suggest that a seemingly miraculous gameboard, and seemingly miraculous game pieces (ourselves), warrant the *possibility* of a gamemaster (God). And, if there's a gamemaster, then there's likely appropriate rules for the game—a way things are supposed to be, a way *we* are supposed to be. These would be the rules for both human and global flourishing. So, for the sake of discussion, let's suppose there is a gamemaster, God. Furthermore, let's suppose that "God" is a supreme title, one that requires: (a) worthiness of worship and full life-commitment (b) moral perfection and (c) an all-loving character. For the sake of discussion, let's consider the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus. This is the God of traditional monotheism, the uniquely personal, loving God of Jewish-Christian theism.<sup>12</sup>

As you'll see, many of the pieces of the puzzle of life fall into place, when a gamemaster factors into our understanding, and we see the "rules" designed to maximize human flourishing.

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<sup>11</sup> Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963), 41.

<sup>12</sup> I quite like the way Paul Moser framed this in his essay, so I have borrowed several of his phrases. See, Paul Moser, *Why Does God Hide From Us?* Merrillville, IN: Ratio Christi, 2022.

## CREATED IN THE “IMAGE OF GOD”

Explicit in the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh), Christian New Testament, and implied in the Koran is the account of human flourishing laid out in the book of Genesis: the plan, the rules, and what went tragically wrong. According to Genesis 1:27 human beings were created “in the image of God.”<sup>13</sup> Our personhood and human nature have been uniquely designed to reflect the nature of God (though in limited form). We were fashioned in the image of our Creator: we think, we choose, we create, and we were designed to love—to experience intimacy with God and each other. The basic concept of the equality and dignity of all humans commonly held today—essential to democratic societies—stems from our unique creation in God’s image. In the prestigious *Journal of Institutional Economics*, economist P. J. Hill confirmed that this basic concept is distinctly sourced within a Judeo-Christian worldview. “The fundamental ideology that is the foundation of the rule of law, namely universal dignity, was formulated in Jewish and Christian thinking.”<sup>14</sup>

To unpack the richness of our human nature, consider the following three factors: we can *relate* with God as person to person, we can *represent* God as those who carry out his responsibilities on this earth, and we can *reflect* God’s character as we mature in our own character. These particular emphases overlap with the three important human themes previously identified in *Figure 2* (the “donut” model)—themes of relationships and community, responsibilities and vocation, and renewal and character formation.

We can *relate* with God, as exemplified by Adam and Eve in the Genesis account. An iPhone or laptop is a designed interface for humans to communicate through technologies. As human beings our capacity to love, empathize, reason, imagine, experience, create, etc. allow us, at a basic, fundamental level, to relate with God. An analogical relationship exists between us as creators and God as Creator, between us as loving parents and God as a loving parent. This relationship allows us to interface with God, and likewise, through our physical bodies we can interface with God’s created order.

We can also *represent* God. Genesis 1:26 says, “so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” We’re God’s managers: governors and guardians of the created order. Nature, like any garden, needs tending and cultivation. As ones who are uniquely able to interface with God, we human beings were, and are, ideally suited to mediate between God and God’s creation. Whatever else was envisaged in this responsibility, we can safely say that polluting and exploiting the planet is its opposite.

Finally, in *reflecting* God, we can mirror the divine characteristics that God desires to form in us. Among human capacities, we might place at the top of the list our self-conscious rationality, free will agency, creativity, moral conscience, aesthetic appreciation,

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**13** Bible citations are from the New International Version.

**14** P. J. Hill, “The religious origins of the rule of law,” *Journal of Institutional Economics* (2020), 16, 317. For further reading of historic societal benefits of Christianity, see Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

and emotionality. Aspects of these abilities have been manifested in the varied outstanding achievements for the betterment of humankind throughout history: the creation of musical wonders, architectural wonders, medical wonders, mathematical wonders, philosophical wonders, literary wonders, and the list goes on.

We exist within time, and so these capacities, latent within us, unfold and develop over time often requiring our attention and participation.

## CHAPTER 4

# PURPOSE OF THE GAME

Before going further, let's review what we've discussed thus far. To better understand life, our world, and ourselves, we applied the analogy of game. It's not a perfect analogy, but no analogy is. First, we looked at our gameboard, that is, the uniqueness of the world we inhabit. Next, we examined ourselves as the playing pieces of the game, noting our distinct faculties and capacities, shedding light on what it means to flourish as human beings. Finally, in turning to the rules of the game, I suggested we posit a gamemaster (e.g., God) and look to the rulebook of traditional monotheism—the Bible—to see what insight it offers on human flourishing—to learn something about how and why God created human beings. What we found in the Genesis account is human beings were created for the purpose of relating to God, representing God, and reflecting God.

If this is so, then the point of the game, it would seem, is to know/pursue/love/serve God. There is a French term for this, *raison d'être*, and it means “the reason or purpose for which something exists.” God is the *raison d'être* for human beings. As the French philosopher and mathematician, Blaise Pascal (d. 1662), put it: there is an emptiness in all of us, that we “try in vain to fill with everything around us” but “this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.”<sup>15</sup> If human flourishing and fruitfulness is predicated on finding and fulfilling our *raison d'être*, then it would behoove us to answer this question: what does it mean to pursue God.

In the New Testament, Jesus is asked by a religious leader to distill or summarize the hundreds upon hundreds of laws and principles contained in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus answers, that the Law and Prophets can be summed up with: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ . . . and . . . ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-38). Essentially, this is Jesus' answer to “What is the point of life?”

To love God with all one's heart, soul, and mind is to pursue God as one might a potential spouse. In a very illuminating passage in the New Testament, we learn that “From one man [God] made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us” (Acts 17:26-27). What this tells us, is God (the gamemaster) has established the game, gameboard, and game pieces for the express purpose of finding those who would freely choose to love him.

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<sup>15</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1966), 75.

## THE CHALLENGE

But here's the challenge and the way that it shapes the game: how does God make himself known to us and invite us into a genuine relationship without coercing us? The philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (d. 1855) described this dilemma with his "The King and Maiden" parable:

*...one day there awoke in the heart of the King an anxious thought: "How in the world is he going to reveal his love to this girl? How could he bridge the chasm that separated the two of them?" His advisers, of course, told him that all he had to do was command her to become his queen, and it would be done. For he was a man of immense power, every statesman feared his wrath, every foreign power trembled before him, and every courtier groveled in the dust at the King's voice.*

*This poor peasant girl would have no power to resist; she would have to become the queen!*

*But power, even unlimited power, cannot command love. The King could force her body to be present in the palace, but he could not force love to be present in her heart. He might be able to gain her obedience this way but coerced submission is not what he wanted. He longed for intimacy of heart and oneness of spirit, and all the power in the world cannot unlock the human heart—it must be opened from within.<sup>16</sup>*

If the foundation of a love relationship is self-giving love, then the "self" must be freely given. Love is *voluntary and mutual commitment*: therefore a genuine relationship must be entered into *freely and not under any coercion of will*.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about the game that God designed is that there is space and freedom built into it, that allows a relational process whereby we choose to love God or not. But that choice is not coerced. In a manner of speaking, God keeps his distance, which means overt or ostentatious demonstrations of his power or presence are not in keeping with his relational intent. Instead, in partial hiddenness, God gives each of us the opportunity to decide whether or not to include or to exclude God from our life. He leaves enough room to accept or reject him. Yet we must not misinterpret God's intentions. This distance he offers does not indicate God's indifference to us. Quite the opposite, it is for the sake of a true mutual loving relationship.<sup>17</sup>

## GENUINE SEEKING

Now we may be in a better position to see that God must *veil* or *hide* his full presence to prevent us from seeking him for the wrong reasons. Yet, God must also provide

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**16** Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1985), 26–28.

**17** Another booklet in the series explores this issue further: Paul K. Moser, *Why Does God Hide From Us?* (Lafayette, IN: Ratio Christi, 2022), [ratiochristi.org](http://ratiochristi.org).

sufficient evidence or information about himself so that an intelligent decision can be made. He must show (1) that he exists and (2) that he desires our friendship. “Anyone who comes to [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). Thus, God maintains a delicate tension between *self-revelation* and *being hidden* in order to guarantee that we respond to God’s initiatives with genuine motives.

This delicate tension is achieved by means of subtle signs and gentle persuasion, the same principles of human courtship. And for those seeking God, “traces” are everywhere. For example, both the vastness of outer space, as well as the inner space of our conscience can stir up questions about the meaning of life. Noting the traces of God that surround us, the philosopher Immanuel Kant (d. 1804) wrote,

*Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me . . . . The former view of a countless multitude of worlds annihilates, as it were, my importance as an animal creature. . . . The latter, on the contrary, infinitely raises my worth as that of an intelligence by my personality, in which the moral law reveals a life independent of all animality and even of the whole world of sense—at least so far as it may be inferred from the purposive destination assigned to my existence by this law, a destination which is not restricted to the conditions and limits of this life but reaches into the infinite.*<sup>18</sup>

But note, this is non-coercive evidence, it is available to those “with ears to hear” but it can easily be dismissed, if one is so inclined. In this way the tension between *self-revelation* and *being hidden* remains taut, and only genuine seekers are rewarded. French philosopher and mathematician, Blaise Pascal (d. 1662) reminds us what God could have done if his only concern was removing disbelief:

*If he had wanted to overcome the obstinacy of the most hardened, he would have been able to by revealing himself so clearly that they could not have doubted the truth of his essence. . . . And so, wanting to appear without disguise to those who sought him with their heart, and hidden from those who flee from him with all their heart, he has modified our recognition of him, giving visible signs to those who seek him and none to those who do not. There is enough light for those who desire to see, and enough darkness for those of a contrary disposition.*<sup>19</sup>

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**18** Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. trans. by Beck. (N.Y.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 166.

**19** Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*. trans. by Honor Levi. (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1995), #182, 57.



## CHAPTER 5

# POWERPACK REQUIRED FOR CONTINUOUS PLAY

When visiting your local toy store or shopping online to buy a birthday or Christmas gift, the portable action games usually require some kind of power supply. You know: “batteries required.” No power source, no playing. The game of life is no different. In his generosity, God offers his common grace or kindness to all—whether we acknowledge him or not. For example, “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45). God permits you and me to have our time to bask in the sun he has created, to enjoy food from the earth, which God waters with rain, and, in a sense, to live as we wish. But life is not all sun and roses. We see it displayed each day on our news apps or TV news shows. A dark side to humanity continuously breaks into our lives, and it erupts from within us. We each have a dark side, though we often live in denial of this fact. As psychiatrist Gerald May notes, “The mind uses denial, repression, and a host of other defense mechanisms to keep us unaware of the truth of our motivations or to justify them falsely.”<sup>20</sup>

Noted earlier, the book of Genesis shows humanity to be the handiwork of God—made in his image—but it also explains the origin of our darker side. Being made in the image of God carried with it the capacity of volitional freedom: the power to choose alternatives, including the alternative to “good” and the alternative to “God.” In this way corruption entered the world through Adam and Eve. We were created for a relationship with God, but intimacy turned to alienation, sin severed our relationship with God and every relationship contingent to it: people with people (war, racism), men with women (sexism, divorce), people with nature (waste, pollution), and people with themselves (shame, fear). This event, referred to as “the Fall” was, quite literally, a “game changer.”

The darkness in the world, is the darkness in us, continually drawing us away from “the good” and away from God. In a manner of speaking, our human playing piece is damaged and twisted. It no longer works as it was originally designed. But, rather than return to intimacy with God, each of us, in our own way, creates our own a path to redemption, replacing God with every conceivable substitute: money, success, popularity, entertainment, possessions, sex, power, drugs, etc.

This, I realize, is grim news, but because the game’s creator is kind and loving, he

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<sup>20</sup> Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1988), 53-54.

graciously provided a way for us to reconnect with God and God's plan for human flourishing.

## RESTORING POWER

In *The World's Religions*, Huston Smith observes, "Only two people ever astounded their contemporaries so much that the question they evoked was not 'Who is he?' But 'What is he?' They were Jesus and Buddha. The answers these two gave were exactly the opposite. Buddha said unequivocally that he was a mere man, not a god—almost as if he foresaw later attempts to worship him. Jesus, on the other hand, claimed...to be divine."<sup>21</sup>

Whether one believes that Jesus was the Son of God (God incarnate) is a question of faith; whether Jesus claimed this is not. In Jesus Christ, God does for us what we could not do for ourselves, building a bridge to us, not us to him. In Jesus, God enters our world, our darkness, and our suffering. Jesus spoke truth, modeled love, dispensed grace, granted forgiveness, and offered life in all of its fullness. And, it is in Jesus that all our sins are forgiven, and the barrier between us and God is removed.

In his death, Jesus embodied our sin and bore its consequence, so that those who believe in him might be reconciled to God, flourish in this world, and have life beyond it. The musician and activist, Bono, explains the significance of Jesus' death this way:

*And yet, along comes this idea called grace. Love interrupts the consequences of your actions. . . the point of the death of Christ is that Christ took on the sins of the world, so that what we put out did not come back to us. That's the point.*

Receiving Christ is a personal decision to place our hope in him for the redemption of our lives. To receive Christ is to accept the means by which God restores our relationship with him. And that restored relationship is the path to human flourishing.

Choosing to receive Christ, brings about a change within us—a kind of spiritual heart surgery to replace our damaged heart: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). This is the battery power I suggested was missing, without which we truly are incapable of living above circumstances and the darker side of our nature.

In John 7:38-39, Jesus said, "'Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive." In turning back to God and trusting in Jesus Christ, God places within us God's Spirit. It is in and through God's Spirit that we receive a new start and the resources to live as we were designed. Through God's Spirit, over time, we progressively work out of our lifestyle the negative patterns, habits, and character flaws built up over years, and through God's Spirit we experience an internal transformation that makes our characters more like the image of God.

<sup>21</sup> Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1991), 82.

We've considered the place to play, pieces to play, rules of play, purpose of play, and the power for continuous play. Lastly, we'll look at the "points" of the game—what does and doesn't count as winning.

## CHAPTER 6

# POINTS FOR WINNING THE GAME

All games have some way to keep score, but whether it's chess, a card game or football, winning or losing is not a matter of life and death—it's just a game. But life is not just any game: how we conduct our lives here makes all the difference in the world, both in this life and the life to come. Someday, we'll all give account for how we played the game, and God will decide. So, what kind of score counts? I do not presume to speak for God, but if we again turn to the Jewish-Christian scripture, and if this does indeed capture the rulebook of the game, then what it says about the point system is worth our attention. The rulebook indicates three levels of scoring.

## DOING GOOD

The first, and most obvious category of scorekeeping is based on *what good (or evil) we do in this life for others (and towards God)*. Throughout the Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament we find numerous mentions that God will assess and judge our deeds—whether seen by others or not—according to his righteous standard. *God is interested in how everyone plays the game of life to benefit others*. One of the clearest biblical passages to state this is written by the Apostle Paul. Paul wrote, God's "righteous judgment will be revealed. God will repay each person according to what they have done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger" (Romans 2:5-8). With God as the Game Master, there'll be ultimate justice and honor for those worthy of honor, but punishment for those who perpetrated evil on this earth. This is the outcome of those who live for self and ignore God.

Another way of assessing moral transformation, is not by looking at individual actions, but by the sort of person we have become: *our formed character is an immediate indicator of our progress in the game of life*. For every decision we make—each persistent thought and action—becomes "recorded" into *our character*. Our character is essentially made up of our core beliefs or convictions, and our desires or "want to's." Thus, every decision we make becomes a building block of our character: we build up an infrastructure of beliefs and tendencies to think and act in certain ways. Although we leave this life empty-handed in a physical way, we don't leave "empty-hearted." We will take with us into the next phase of life (the afterlife) the kind of person we are becoming—the results of our earthly choices and actions.

## WHICH TEAM TO PLAY ON?

The most important factor on the scoreboard of the game of life is that ultimately winning or losing depends on whose team we decide to play. Do we play the game of life *with* God, or *without* God? And that decision about which team then has significant implications for now and for life beyond this world. The default decision is to live life apart from God. If we *want* no God, our choice is granted us—we *get* no God, permanently! Living eternally in the absence of God’s light, life, beauty, joy, and goodness, is what the Bible terms “Hell.” It may seem odd that a person would choose this, but in truth we are surrounded by such people, who, every day, quite consciously want nothing to do with God. Why would death change this?

Remember the Donut Model (*Figure 2*)? Now the “donut hole” can be filled in (see *Figure 3*) in order for human life to achieve all of its potential, we were designed for an intimate relationship with God that would permit us to experience a supernaturally-empowered lifestyle, living beyond the limitations of our own powers. But, as we’ve seen,

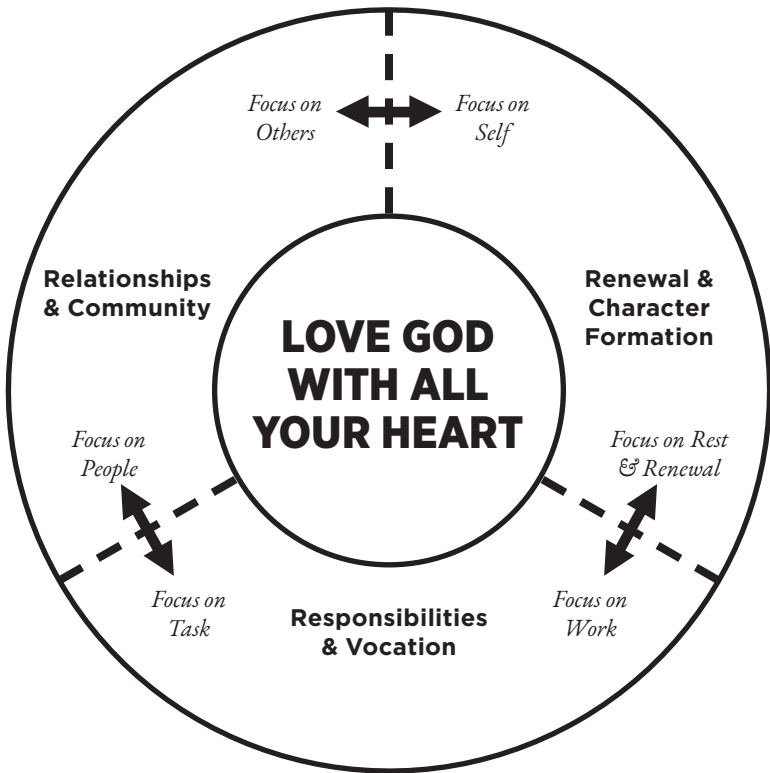


Figure 3: **Four** Themes of Human Development

humanity, by its own choosing, is divorced from God: a state of separation evidenced daily in war, racism, pollution, murder, rape, etc. But, as we've also seen, God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves: through Jesus Christ, we can be reconciled to God. That choice is ours.

## **THE SIX GAME COMPONENTS OF LIFE**

*Table 3* offers an overview of the six general components of the game of life we've surveyed, summarizing the main points. Although life is much more than a game, looking at life this way may help us see through the temporal aspects of life into the life beyond.

## **THE CHOICE TO LIVE FOR GOD**

The choice to be reconciled to God, foundationally changes our life here and life in the world to come. This one-time, momentous decision can be done anywhere and at any time—since God is always accessible anywhere and anytime. There are no special words to say. It is a sincere response of recognition of being at odds with God—of having engaged in a life of doing what we want rather than what God wants (what the Bible calls *sin*), and a sincere acknowledgment that only God can fix your life to maximize it as it was meant to be. You can invite Jesus Christ into your life right now: to forgive your sin, to empower you to live a life that's fruitful, flourishing, and pleasing to God, and to give you life everlasting. The invitation of Jesus is for you: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25–26).

Being "at peace with God and man" is the core ingredient of the game of life. When we're right with God, all of life comes into proper focus. No matter what we've done in the past, God's invitation to join his family and into friendship with him is always available.

GAME COMPONENTS	FACTORS IN THE GAME OF LIFE
PLACE	Spaceship Earth
PIECES	<p>“Givens” at birth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Physical Body</li> <li>• Family, Socio-Economic Status, Culture, Language</li> <li>• Country, Government, Topography, Weather</li> <li>• Time in History</li> </ul>
PLAY	<p><b>Skill:</b> Whatever is in our control (e.g., effort, use of talents) [God assures ultimate “fair play”]</p> <p><b>Chance:</b> Whatever is out of our control, but supervised sovereignly by God.</p>
PURPOSE	To enter into greater flourishing as humans created in the image of God, both in this world and in the life beyond the grave, by restoring our relationship with God through receiving Jesus Christ as our Redeemer
POWERPACK	<p>Two options available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Default/Standard Equipment: Using only natural human power (no power to resist the dark side)</li> <li>• <b>With necessary divine PowerPack:</b> Ability to resist the dark side and live more in the right, the good and the beautiful</li> </ul>
POINTS	<p>God is the Scorekeeper and Judge</p> <p><b>First Level:</b> Most significant score: Whether or not we accept the grand and free offer to be adopted into God’s family. On whose team are we at death, at the end of the game of life will determine our future destiny: To be with God forever or not? <i>(Default position is to remain outside of God’s family.)</i></p> <p><b>Second Level:</b> Quality of our character, which has been formed by God’s power to become more like his own character.</p> <p><b>Third Level:</b> Quality of our actions. What have we done for others? Rewards and/or punishments based on quality of life on earth (our words and deeds).</p>

Table 3 Summary of the Game of Life

## SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

**Alcorn, Randy.** *Deadline. Sisters*, OR: Multnomah/Questar, 1994. A readable and intriguing “who dunnit” fictional novel that explores various facets of life from a non-Christian as well as a Christian perspective.

**Issler, Klaus.** *Wasting Time With God: A Christian Spirituality of Friendship With God.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001. A readable guide for developing a closer relationship with God. The first part looks at barriers that can get in the way (e.g., our relational immaturity, pride, and God’s invisibility). The second part explores issues related to God’s hiddenness, seeking guidance, responding to suffering, and prayer.

**Moreland, J. P.** *Love Your God With All Your Mind.* Rev. ed. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012. A readable guide for developing a life of the mind. Dr. Moreland challenges readers to become a thoughtful Christian.

**Packer, J. I.** *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001. A very readable and informative survey of the main teachings of Christianity, by a master theologian.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Klaus Issler has a Ph.D. in education from Michigan State University, an M.A. from University of California at Riverside, and a Master of Theology from Dallas Theological Seminary. He has written various books, including *The Lost Virtue of Happiness* with J. P. Moreland, *How We Learn, Jesus, Money, and Work*, and co-edited *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective*. His articles have appeared *American National Biography*, and in such journals as *Philosophi Christi*, *Journal of Moral Education*, *Journal of Markets and Morality*, and *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. He is Emeritus Professor of Educational Studies and Theology at Biola University. He and his wife Beth live in Colorado near family.

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