

What on earth are we here for?

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

(Matthew 10: 28-32)

“What's it all about, Alfie
Is it just for the moment we live?”

Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson are on a camping trip.

In the middle of the night, Holmes nudges Watson awake, and says,

"Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see."

"I see millions of stars, my dear Holmes."

"And what do you infer from seeing these stars?"

"Well, a number of things," he says, lighting his pipe:

Astronomically, I observe that there are millions of galaxies and billions of stars and planets.

Theologically, I see that God is all-powerful, and man, his creation, small and insignificant.

What about you, Holmes?"

"Watson, you fool. Someone has stolen our tent!"

It would not be hard to agree with Watson's theology that human beings compared to the size of the universe are small and insignificant, would it?

However, Jesus would disagree, for Jesus argued that every hair on our heads is numbered, that God sees every sparrow fall, that we are each precious to God.

Even though space is incredibly vast the tiny microbes play a very significant role.

According to the psalmist God knows whether we are sitting or standing, whether we are walking or lying down. God knows every detail of our conduct. And that is sobering isn't it, especially when we

are not being kind!?! The psalmist argues that no matter where we go, God is there.

God is aware in a loving sense, a sense of deep caring. God is interested in us! God's heart is kind. And that is incredibly humbling, isn't it?

We cannot be our own idea. So, if we are not our own idea, Whose idea are we and what on earth are we here for?

If you walk by the Avon River in Stratford and see little ducklings, they are fully engaged with life! Mother sets sail and they all follow her in the water. Their lives are drenched in purpose. This is true for all animals. They have an incredible will to live. Only when animals are caged or confined do we see them droop and fail to thrive. But release them and purpose returns instantly.

I once caught a ground hog and tried to domesticate it. It was a dull failure. He refused to eat anything. But when I opened the trap door he took off with incredible purposeful speed! He knew the difference between being confined and having freedom!

I had an aunt in England who would rescue battery hens from their cages. Worn out through night and day egg laying, their feathers falling out, they were incredibly miserable birds when she got them. But then she would look after them and love them, giving them a proper run, allowing them to scratch the ground and they would recover. The feathers would come back, the curiosity would return and they would begin to thrive! And they started to lay eggs again!

We are free as human beings. We can treat each other well or we can sink into the depths of depravity. We can nurture each other or destroy each other, and God does not stop us from behaving badly or well. That is freedom!

We are free not to believe in God either. We can decide to be atheists. We can argue that the universe is impersonal and uncaring about our fate. We can feel that we are alone on this planet and in space. We can

teach survival of the fittest and dispense with morality. Oh yes, we are free! Awesomely free.

In the great Riverside Church in New York, William Sloane Coffin once cried out to God saying “God, You have given us too much freedom. We can’t handle it!”

Did you ever feel like that? Wanting God to stop the train so you could get off, avoid all the suffering, death and the unraveled fabric of life with all its short ends? You are not alone.

If God is a loving God why ever did God make us so free that we could end life on earth with a nuclear war? Whatever could the purpose be for such freedom? What’s it all about when you work it out Alfie?

When Hal David wrote “What’s it all about Alfie?” he struck a chord of deep truth: “As sure as I believe there's a heaven above, Alfie
I know there's something much more
Something even non-believers can believe in
I believe in love, Alfie.”

Jesus taught us that Human life on this planet is all about Love!

But Love can be very costly. You can love and lose your loved one. If you fall in love and the other person doesn’t, You cannot compel their affections. You can have your heart broken. Why? because love has to be freely given. As the Beatles said; Money can’t buy you love! But they also said Love is all you need!

But for true love to exist, it needs absolute freedom, and that is why the planet is designed the way it is.

Robert Frost in his great poem Birches said; “Earth's the right place for love:

I don't know where it's likely to go better.”

What would you change on earth? How would you FIX it? Would you take away our awesome freedom for good or ill?

Would Earth still be the right place for love?

I have concluded that this world is the best possible world for its central purpose. I believe that we are here to make our souls and there is no better place in the universe than the Earth for that purpose! For suffering can build character.

Over the years when I have asked what on earth am I here for, the best most powerful answer I have received is this: *We are here to be kind!*

When we are kind the whole world fills with meaning and hope and joy. When we love God with all our heart our mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves, life fills with purpose. Being kind above all other things pleases the God who sees a sparrow fall and who asked us to love our neighbor and our enemy. Being kind to absolutely everyone can be hard at times, but overall being kind makes life memorable and profoundly worth living!

A number of years ago, Kent Nerburn drove a cab for a living. One time he arrived in the middle of the night for a pick up at a building that was dark except for a single light in a ground floor window.

He walked to the door and knocked.

"Just a minute," answered a frail, elderly voice.

After a long pause, the door opened. A small woman in her 80's stood before him. She was wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it, like somebody out of a 1940s movie. By her side was a small nylon suitcase.

The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. All the furniture was covered with sheets. There were no clocks on the walls, no knickknacks or utensils on the counters. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware.

"Would you carry my bag out to the car?" she said. He took the suitcase to the cab, then returned to assist the woman. She took his arm and they walked slowly toward the curb. She kept thanking him for his kindness.

"It's nothing," he told her. "I just try to treat my passengers the way I would want my mother treated."

"Oh, you're such a good boy," she said. When they got to the cab, she gave him an address, then asked, "Could you drive through downtown?"

"It's not the shortest way," he answered quickly.

"Oh, I don't mind," she said. "I'm in no hurry. I'm on my way to... hospice."

He looked in the rear-view mirror. Her eyes were glistening.

"I don't have any family left," she continued. "The doctor says I don't have very long."

He quietly reached over and shut off the meter. "What route would you like me to take?" he asked.

For the next two hours, they drove throughout the city. She showed him the building where she had once worked as an elevator operator. They drove through the neighborhood where she and her husband had lived when they were newlyweds. She had him pull up in front of a furniture warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she had gone dancing as a young girl.

Sometimes she'd ask him to slow in front of a particular building or corner and would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing.

As the first hint of sun creasing the horizon, she suddenly said, "I'm tired. Let's go now."

They drove in silence to the address given.

It was a low building, like a small convalescent home, with a driveway that passed under a portico. Two orderlies came out to the cab as soon as they pulled up. They were solicitous and intent, watching her every move. They must have been expecting her. He opened the trunk and took the small suitcase to the door. The woman was already seated in a wheelchair.

"How much do I owe you?" she asked, reaching into her purse.

"Nothing," he said.

"You have to make a living," she answered.

"There are other passengers."

Almost without thinking, he bent down and gave her a hug. She held onto him tightly.

"You gave an old woman a little moment of joy," she said. "Thank you."

He squeezed her hand, then walked away into the dim morning light.

Behind him, a door shut. It was the sound of the closing of a life.

He didn't pick up any more passengers that shift. He drove and drove, lost in thought. For the rest of that day, He could hardly talk. On a quick review, **Nerburn didn't think that he had done anything more important with his life than that.** He says “ We're conditioned to think that our lives revolve around great moments. But great moments often catch us unaware—beautifully wrapped in what others may consider a small one.

In this I believe we are like God.

As the old hymn says:

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
like the wideness of the sea.

There's a kindness in God's justice,
which is more than liberty.

But we make God's love too narrow
by false limits of our own,
and we magnify its strictness
with a zeal God will not own.

For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind,
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

What's it all about, Alfie?

Is it just for the moment we live?

What's it all about when you sort it out, Alfie?

Are we meant to take more than we give

Or are we meant to be kind?

Amen