

You Only Live Once

By David Feddes

Once upon a time there was a pampered prince. His father, the king, wanted this prince always to be sheltered from anything painful or unpleasant. He built three palaces for the prince to live in to keep the prince in perpetual pleasure. He made sure that nobody old or sick or with any problem ever came near the prince. When the prince would travel from one palace to the next, they made sure that the journey was always free of any unpleasant sight.

When the prince was sixteen, he was given a beautiful bride, and together they had a son. The prince continued to live that way. He lived in luxury until he was twenty-nine years old. But at that age he found that all that pleasure and all of that happy, perfect life didn't satisfy him. So he decided to take a little journey without the supervision and protection of his father, who had been making sure everything looked good all the time.

On that journey he saw four sights. The first sight he saw was a very old man, and he had never seen an old man before. The next sight he saw was somebody who was very sick and in tough shape, and he had never seen anything but healthy people before. The third sight that he saw was a dead body, and he had not known that there was such a thing as death and had never seen a dead body before. The fourth thing that he saw was a hermit.

He decided to leave his royal palace and his royal family and to become a hermit, and that is what he did. He pondered these sights that he had seen of sickness, old age, and death, and he pondered these hard realities of suffering.

Finally, one day, sitting under a tree, the prince found enlightenment. He came to sense that he at last was in a state of bliss. Then he decided to share what he had discovered with others, and he became known to his followers as the Buddha. He wanted to share enlightenment with other people, the enlightenment that had begun when he saw sickness and old age and and death and pondered what all of that meant.

In some ways, the story of the Buddha is a lot like the journey of the writer of Ecclesiastes. He was king in Jerusalem. His father had been the great King David. His life had been laid out for him pretty well. He was given enormous wisdom, and he had the most successful reign of any king in the history of the realm. What could be better?

Then he started thinking. That's a dangerous and painful thing to do, to be thinking about not just the golden age and the success that I'm having, but to realize that the years are going by, and there are sick people, there are old people, there are dead people, and in fact we're all going to end up that way. What does it all amount to? He gets to thinking, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

There is some overlap between the Buddha and Ecclesiastes. The overlap is a person thinking hard about realities that stare you in the face. But there are also some very great differences. The Buddha had a certain view of life, much of it in common with Hinduism and other Eastern religions. Let's consider some statements from Buddhist teachers.

Buddhist concepts

One thing that Buddhists believe in is **karma**. "Buddhists understand karma as a natural law. There's no judgment, no divine intervention, and no gods that steer man's destiny, but only the law of karma itself, which works on a global time frame. Deeds yield consequences either in the next second, in the next hour, day, month, year, decade, or even in the next lifetime, or in another distant lifetime." Buddhism is basically an atheistic philosophy. They don't believe in any kind of personal god, but only in the impersonal law of karma.

They also believe in **reincarnation**: "Rebirth, or reincarnation, has always been an important tenet in Buddhism; and it is often referred to as walking the wheel of life (samsara). It is the process of being born over and over again in different times and different situations, possibly for many thousand times."

The idea of reincarnation has some attraction even to some Westerners who didn't grow up Buddhist. Wouldn't it be cool to be a tiger and then come back as a toucan? Wouldn't it be great to live life as a hawk soaring high in the sky, and live another life as a king? Variety is the spice of life, and a variety of lives is really spicy. That might sound kind of fun.

Reincarnation also provides a sense of explanation. Sometimes terrible things happen to you, and you don't know why. You thought you did what was necessary to avoid it. You didn't think you did anything bad to bring that particular trouble on you, but reincarnation explains it. You did something bad in a previous life which is responsible for things that are happening to you now. That relieves you a bit of assuming you did something wrong in this life. You did it back then in a previous life you can't remember. But hey, that past self was sort of you, but sort of not you. At least it helps explain why bad stuff happens when you don't feel you deserve it.

Another possible attraction of reincarnation is that if at first you don't succeed, try, try again. If you blow it in this life, you haven't blown it permanently. You get another crack at it, and if you blow that one, you get another chance, and if you blow that one, you get another chance. You might have to go through many, many, many lifetimes, but at some point you will enter into enlightenment. There's a lot of attraction to the idea that you can't be ruined permanently and that things can't help but turn out in the end.

Buddhists seek **enlightenment**? What does that involve? Ultimately it means **no self**. It means not only that there is no personal god but also no personal you. There are no personal beings, period. "In the Buddhist analogy, the universe is in motion due to karmic forces. A ripple, a wave, or a billow may seem like an individual entity for a moment, creating the illusion that it has a self, but it is gone in the next moment. The truth is that all individuals are one. A ripple is a temporary phenomenon; it is just water in motion... It would be ridiculous to say that a single ripple or wave has a self." You don't have a self. Enlightenment is discovering that fact and experiencing that all is one.

Those are some basics of Buddhism. It's been adapted in various ways in different cultures. With the help of Oprah Winfrey, it gets spread in our culture through a few of her favorite Buddhists.

Oprah's Buddhists

Gary Zukav says of karma, "The Universe does not judge. It compassionately provides for us the consequences that we create with our choices, whatever those consequences are. That is how karma works. The power to create your experience is fully in your hands. That is the lesson of karma." What happens to you is what you deserve. It's what you caused. As the old saying goes, "What comes around goes around." The Universe, with a capital U, is some sort of impersonal force that brings all of that about.

Gary Zukav says of reincarnation, " You do not suffer for eternity because you do the wrong thing once, or twice, or even time after time. It is not possible to do a wrong thing. You do what you do, and you experience the consequences of it. It's that simple. If you don't experience those consequences before you die, your soul creates another life so that you can. That is reincarnation."

Eckhart Tolle, another teacher featured by Oprah, says, "Life is one, and I am one with all life. Enlightenment is simply your natural state of felt oneness with being." That's enlightenment. Then Tolle tries to merge this with Christianity: "Yes, you *are* the Truth. If you look for it elsewhere, you will be deceived every time. The very being that you are is Truth. Jesus tried to convey that when he said, 'I am the way and the truth and the life.' Jesus speaks of the innermost I Am, the essence identity of every man and woman, every life-form, in fact. He speaks of the life that you are. Buddhists call it your Buddha nature; for Hindus, it is Atman, the indwelling God."

When Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life," you may have thought he meant that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. But, according to Tolle, what Jesus really meant was that each of us should think, "I, I, me, me. I am the way and the truth and the life, and whatever I need, I should look inside myself. There I will find that force that pervades and rules the whole universe, and that force is I." You can see why that might appeal to some people. You worship yourself as the god within.

G. K. Chesterton commented on this kind of religion: "Of all horrible religions, the most horrible is the worship of the god within. That Jones shall worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones. Let Jones worship the sun or moon, anything rather than the inner light. Let Jones worship cats or crocodiles, if he can find any in his street, but not the god within. Christianity came into the world firstly in order to assert that a man has not only to look inwards but to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine Captain. The only fun of being a Christian was that a man was not left alone with the inner light but definitely recognized an outer light, fair as the sun, clear as the moon, terrible as an army with banners."

Bible vs. Buddhism

Buddha thought about many of the same things that are thought about in the Bible, and rightly so. But he came to some very different conclusions. How you live your life and what your life means has to be settled in view of what the truth is about these matters.

Bible	Buddhism
One life	Many lives
Revelation	Meditation
Personal God	Impersonal force
Desire is a fleeting pointer to God and greater pleasures	Desire is the source of all suffering; desire is to be snuffed out
Providence can't be predicted or controlled	Cause-and-effect karma determines all
Resurrection to eternal joy or punishment	Nirvana: escaping body and thought

When you have a little baby, or when someone has just died, you have to think about what comes in between birth and death. Is that all there is? Is there one life, or many, many, many lives in this world? The Bible says there's one life. Buddhism says many lives.

The Bible says that we learn and experience enlightenment through God's revelation of a personal God. Buddhism says we discover it through meditation and discovering that we have no self, that there are no gods, and that we have simply become aware of the oneness of the world.

The Bible teaches again and again a personal God. Buddhism speaks of an impersonal force.

The Bible says that desire is fleeting. Ecclesiastes talks about desire a lot, and pleasure. It doesn't say those things are necessarily bad, but it says they're fleeting, and they're meant to point you to something else. "God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). So desire and those beautiful times are supposed to awaken you to eternity. Desire is a fleeting points to God and greater, eternal pleasures. In contrast, Buddhism says desire is the source of all suffering. If you didn't have any desire, you wouldn't suffer. So the goal of Buddhism is to snuff out all desire, to snuff out all sense of your own being and identity.

The Bible says providence is governed by a personal God. It can't be predicted or controlled by us because we're not running the show. Buddhism speaks of karma, an impersonal law of cause and effect that determines everything.

The Bible, in speaking of one life to live, is not saying that's all there is. It's just saying that beyond that one life that we live under the sun and on earth, there is eternal life and resurrection life in an eternal, glorious body. Buddhism teaches that after a lot of reincarnations, we eventually enter a state of Nirvana in which we escape the body, we escape thought.

Sometimes Westerners think, "Reincarnation sounds kind of cool. Wouldn't it be exciting to come back in a whole bunch of different lives?" But in classical Buddhism and Hinduism, that wheel of reincarnation is considered a terrible thing. You die, and you die, and you die, and you want to get off that wheel. You don't want to come back. You just want to get off that wheel so you're not running like a hamster through various lives anymore. You want to escape your body. You want to escape thought and be merged into the universal force and get rid of the illusion that you are somebody.

Providence, not predictability

In light of the difference between Buddhism and Christianity, I want to look at Ecclesiastes 9. Ecclesiastes has been reflecting on the injustices in the world, the reality of death, the fact that pleasures may be fun for a moment, but then they're gone. Those are the same things the Buddha reflected on. Let's give him credit. He thought hard about important things.

"So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no one knows whether love or hate awaits him" (9:1)

The universe is not just something where different laws kick in. Whether you call it the laws of science or the laws of karma, you are misled if you think some sort of impersonal force rules and guides everything that happens. It's a personal God and his providence, providence in which he provides for and plans for all that happens.

What righteous people and wise people do are in God's hands. That's a wonderful truth. Being the author of Ecclesiastes, he can't just leave it with a smile. He also tells you what the difficult side is. It's great to be in God's hands, but you have no clue what's coming next. You don't know whether love is coming at you, whether hate is coming at you.

In Genesis 37-50, Joseph's life was in God's hands. Joseph was righteous and wise, no doubt about it. Were the events of his life predictable? Well, he dreamed that he was going to be ruling someday, but then he winds up getting dumped into a hole in the ground. Then he gets sold as a slave. Then he gets framed for attempted rape when he didn't do it and sits in prison for quite a while. He didn't know all that was waiting for him. Then he wound up being the second highest man in all of Egypt.

In all of that, God was ruling, and God had a plan. But there were a lot of times when Joseph must have wondered, "What in the world is going on here?" God's providence rules, but that does not mean your life is simple or predictable. We don't know exactly what God's will is for my future or for your future. So we just have to live by trust in his hands without saying that we can predict it all.

Unavoidable death

The second thing that Ecclesiastes 9 mentions, besides God's providence, is that death is unavoidable. "All share a common destiny--the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them" (9:2).

Whether you choose this or that, whether you are this or that, you die. That's something that the Buddha thought about hard, that Ecclesiastes thought about very hard, and that we spend a good deal of our lives trying not to think about until we really can't avoid thinking about it anymore. Death is simply unavoidable. If you're going to have any kind of philosophy that deals with

reality as it is, you've got to account for the reality of death, where it comes from, and what lies beyond it.

Life can be wasted

A third fact: life can be wasted. Yes, you can blow it. You can throw away the one life you've been given, and you can't get it back again. "This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead" (9:3).

Somebody once said to me, "It seems like the basic plot of Ecclesiastes in each new chapter is, 'I had another bad day.'" Actually, almost every day he had was good! He was the king. He had everything going for him. But he had a lot of dark thoughts in the middle of his good days. He saw what was going on, and he saw that, yes, people can be evil. They can be absolutely nuts, crazy, mad. Then they die. And they don't get another life under the sun, and then another life, and another life until they finally get it right. You can be wicked and stupid and die that way. You passed through this life, and you wasted it. You never knew what it was all about. Life can be wasted: that's not very uplifting, but it's true, so he thinks hard about it.

How can you escape this evil and madness? Let's look at two examples.

One is Nebuchadnezzar, the king who said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built?" God judged him, and suddenly he thought he was a cross between a bird and a cow. They put him out to pasture, and he was out eating grass and doing weird stuff. Then, he says, "I looked up to heaven, and my sanity was restored" (Daniel 4:34). Men are full of madness, but when they look up to heaven, some semblance of sanity comes back to them.

Or take Jesus' story of the prodigal son. He takes all of his inheritance even before his father dies. He squanders it all. Then sitting among filthy pigs, longing for some of their food. At last, says Jesus, "He came to his senses." He said, "I will return to my Father" (Luke 15:17-18).

You can be wasting your life, but the waste ends when you look up to heaven and say, "I will return to my Father." Your sanity and wellbeing can be restored by turning to God. But if you don't, your life can be wasted, and when it's over, it's over.

When it's over, it's over

"Anyone who is among the living has hope. Even a live dog is better off than a dead lion" (9:4). You might say, "What? I like dogs!" Well, maybe so, but Ecclesiastes didn't. That was a time when people didn't have dogs for pets. The dogs were mangy curs. Nobody thought much of them. Yet he says, "You're better off being a mangy cur that's alive than the noble king of beasts lying there dead and rotting."

"For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun" (9:5-6).

Sometimes it's said at a funeral, "Their body has died, but their spirit is still with us." That is not true. Their spirit is somewhere else. Their spirit is not still with us. There may be memories of them. Their influence may live on in certain respects, but their spirit is not still with us. It's taken from this world. Their spirit is not under the sun anymore.

Ecclesiastes was written before Jesus came, before the full light of the gospel. It's giving us hard questions so that when Jesus comes, we will recognize what a glorious answer the gospel gives to those questions. Jesus "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). There are certainly hints and suggestions in the Old Testament of the life to come, and those are plain enough. But when you consider it from the Ecclesiastes point of view, what is life under the sun? In this world, when it's over, it's over, and we just have to face that fact.

Those are the facts Ecclesiastes 9 makes us face:

- **Trust God's providence, not predictability.** God holds in his hand those who are in tune with him--but that's no guarantee that life will be easy or fun.
- **Death is unavoidable.** No matter who you are or what you do, death awaits you.
- **Life can be wasted.** People tend to waste their one life on evil and madness.
- **When it's over, it's over.** When you die, your earthly actions and hopes end.

You only live once

As you read on in the passage, there are basic principles for only living once.

- Enjoy what you have.
- Do what you can.
- Accept that you can't control everything.
- Be ready to meet your Maker.

Enjoy what you have

Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun--all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. (9:7-9)

Here's a little footnote there about translation. The Hebrew word translated "meaningless" is *hevel*. Sometimes it can mean "fleeting." I'm not sure "meaningless" is the best translation here, but life is fleeting. It vanishes quickly, so make the most of it while you have it.

Notice what he's saying here. If you've got food, eat it. If you've got a hamburger, don't wish it was caviar. Enjoy the burger. If you're given a wife, enjoy your wife. If you have a husband, enjoy him. Don't spend your time thinking about the other people that you didn't marry or wishing you had found better. Enjoy the one you have. If you have some nice clothes, put them

on, enjoy them, and waste time wishing you had something different to wear. Enjoy what you have.

Many of the very best things in life are available to the very simplest people. If you have one great spouse, you're happier than Solomon was with his thousand women. If you have a good set of clothes to wear and you're happy with it, you're better off than somebody who's spending a pile of money every day on something different so they can look a little different. Just enjoy the life that God has given you.

That's one of the great messages of Ecclesiastes. If you can enjoy what God gives you, then that enjoyment itself is a gift from God. You can have all kinds of stuff, but you'll miss out if God doesn't give you that gift of enjoyment. So take life as a gift and enjoy what you have.

This is the opposite of what Buddha counsels. He says, "Get rid of desire. Get rid of all sense of enjoyment. Realize that you are an illusion, that this world is an illusion, and just write it off. Get over it." No. Enjoy what you have.

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1). "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (1 Timothy 4:4-5). Food and clothes and a spouse are good gifts. They aren't the greatest gift or the only gift, but they're good ones. So enjoy them. Enjoy what you have.

Do what you can

Then do what you can during the one life you have, because you don't get chances to come back. You're not going to be reincarnated under the sun in a whole bunch of different lives, and you're not going to be able to come back as a spirit or a ghost. Sometimes you get that message from Hollywood, whether it's *The Sixth Sense* or *Ghost* or other movies or TV shows. People who have died get a chance to come back as a spirit and right the things that were wrong, to say "I love you" to the people they neglected to tell they loved, to say, "I'm sorry," to people they failed to apologize to.

You won't get another chance to do that after you die. If you want to say "I'm sorry" because you wronged somebody, today is the day to do that, because counting on coming back as a spirit someday to say you're sorry will not happen. If you're waiting to say "I love you" until some distant day, why not say "I love you" today? If you want to make a difference in this world, you better make it now, because now is the time that God is giving you.

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, where you are going" (9:10). From the perspective of life under the sun, once you're in Sheol, the realm of the dead, you don't get a chance to do stuff here on earth anymore. So whatever it is you have in mind to do, now is the time to do it.

I won't go into details about people who told me after a loved one died, "I wish I had said or done this while they were still living." Or people who are on their deathbed, and they have their

regrets, they have their wishes, and they don't have a chance to undo them anymore. Now is the time to do what you can.

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward" (Colossians 4:23-24). Those words, by the way, were written to slaves. When you hear me say, "Do what you can" you might reply, "If I had a real go-getter job, if I was one of those movers and shakers, if I was one of those people who could change the world, I would get excited and I'd do something." But these words in Colossians are written to people who are in rotten jobs, who are slaves, who are stuck. But God still says to work at it with all your heart. The Bible also tells slaves, "If you can gain your freedom, do so" (1 Corinthians 7:21). But meanwhile, if you're stuck in a position you don't want to be in, make the most of it.

Many of us, of course, are not slaves, though there are days when we feel like it. We may feel like we're in a dead-end job or a situation that doesn't have much potential. You are not God. You do not have unlimited potential. I hate to break it to you. They often tell young people at graduations, "You have unlimited potential." No, you don't. You have limits that you need to face honestly. You can't do everything. You're not omnipotent. You don't know everything. But you do know some things, and you do have some powers, and you do have some realm of responsibility where you can do things and make a difference. So do it without wishing you could be somebody else doing something else. Do what you can.

Accept that you can't control everything

I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all. Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them. (9:11-12)

You can't control everything. You eat healthy. You exercise well. Then you get a brain tumor at age forty-six. The other guy is a chain smoker and lives to be ninety. It happens. There are generally things that are healthier to do and unhealthier to do, but they don't guarantee what the outcome is going to be.

You can be a great athlete. You can be a hockey player, and your shot hits the crossbar, and the other guy's goes in the net by a half inch. You don't have control. It's the way the puck bounces.

There are so many things where it doesn't always go to the fastest or the best or the most skilled. "Time and chance happen to them all." Stuff happens. It just happens, and you don't know when it's going to happen or why or how. So you've got to be able to live with that.

That adds one more factor to the whole equation. Everybody dies, and you don't know when. So you always have to be ready for that eventuality.

Be ready to meet your Maker

The end of Ecclesiastes says, "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (12:13-14).

Buddhist teachers deny that there is a personal God or that there is one decisive final judgment where God evaluates your life. But that is not the truth of the matter. God will bring every deed into judgment.

Hebrews 9:27-28 is probably the clearest single statement in the Bible that rules out reincarnation: "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."

When you know that you only live once under the sun, then you have to think, "But is that all there is? Is that it?" The Buddha had a good intuition in saying, "That's not all there is. There's got to be something else, something more." But what is the something more? Only the Son of God can tell us that.

Resurrection, not reincarnation

Enjoy what you have. Do what you can. Accept that you can't control everything. Be ready to meet your Maker. But how? How can you be ready to meet your Maker and to make the most of the life that you're given now? It all depends on faith in Jesus' resurrection.

Buddhists don't believe in bodily resurrection. Likewise, atheists don't believe in eternal life in a glorious body that never dies. The Bible describes the logical result of such a worldview: "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Corinthians 15:32) Have as much fun as you can. When you're gone, it's over. Nobody to answer to. Nothing to look forward to. So enjoy life while you can. They might agree with the advice in Ecclesiastes to enjoy what you have and do what you can. *Carpe diem*. Seize the day. Make the most of it. Then it's over.

But it's not over! Christ has been raised from the dead. That's the key to a full, meaningful life now and an eternal life of unlimited joy. "Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:57-58).

Over and over, Ecclesiastes wrestles with a sense of everything being vanity, "in vain." If you don't want your life and your labor to be in vain, then you need to understand that through the resurrection of Jesus Christ your labor is not in vain.

The title of this message, "You Only Live Once," is not quite accurate. You only live once *under the sun*, but then you live forever. How you live life under the sun and what has happened to you in this life matter. If you've been born again by the Spirit of God in this life, then the life of

Christ that's in you continues, and you continue as a personal being, raised in Christ into the next life.

You only live once under the sun. You only get one chance to come to know God in this life, so make the most of it, and then live for him. Put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There's wickedness and madness in everybody's hearts, and then they die. Well then, shouldn't we repent of the wickedness and turn from the madness, lift our eyes to heaven, have our sanity restored, come to ourselves, and say, "I will go to my Father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you'"? When we do that, we suddenly find that, yes, we wasted a chunk of our life, but not the whole thing. We were among the pigs in the slop for a little while, but when you return to your Father, the ring goes back on your hand, the family robe goes back on you, and you are again a son of the King.

This life is our opportunity to do that, to go home again, to be back in the arms of our Father again. We don't get more chances beyond death. We get those opportunities now.

Only one life, 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last.

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Pampered prince

- His father, the king, sheltered him from anything troubling.
- Three palaces were built to keep the prince in perpetual pleasure.
- At 16 he was given a beautiful bride. They had a son.
- He lived in luxury until age 29, but pleasures could not satisfy him.

Four sights

1. A person with a serious disease.
2. An old man in failing health
3. A dead body
4. A hermit seeking enlightenment

Upset by these sights, Prince Siddhartha Gautama left behind his royal robes, his royal family, and his royal palaces, and he became a hermit on a quest to learn what it all meant. Sitting under a tree one day, he declared that he experienced enlightenment. The former prince led others on his path to enlightenment and became known as the Buddha.

Karma

"Buddhists understand karma as a natural law. There is no judgment, no divine intervention, and no gods that steer man's destiny, but only the law of karma itself, which works on a global time frame. Deeds yield consequences either in the next second, in the next hour, day, month, year, decade, or even in the next lifetime, or in another distant lifetime."

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Enlightenment: no self

In the Buddhist analogy, the universe is in motion due to karmic forces. A ripple, a wave, or a billow may seem as an individual entity for a moment, creating the illusion that it has a self, but it is gone in the next moment. The truth is that all individuals are one. A ripple is a temporary

phenomenon; it is just water in motion... it would be ridiculous to say that a single ripple or wave has a self.

Karma

Gary Zukav: "The Universe does not judge. It compassionately provides for us the consequences that we create with our choices, whatever those consequences are. That is how karma works. The power to create your experience is fully in your hands. That is the lesson of karma."

Reincarnation

Gary Zukav: "You do not suffer for eternity because you do the wrong thing once, or twice, or even time after time. It is not possible to do a wrong thing. You do what you do, and you experience the consequences of it. It's that simple. If you don't experience those consequences before you die, your soul creates another life so that you can. That is reincarnation."

Enlightenment

Life is one and I am one with all life. Enlightenment is simply your natural state of felt oneness with Being. (Eckhart Tolle, author of #1 bestsellers *The Power of Now* and *A New Earth*; featured on The Oprah Winfrey Show)

Your innermost I Am?

"Yes, you *are* the Truth. If you look for it elsewhere, you will be deceived every time. The very Being that you are is Truth. Jesus tried to convey that when he said, 'I am the way and the truth and the life.'" Jesus speaks of the innermost I Am, the essence identity of every man and woman, every life-form, in fact. He speaks of the life that you are. Buddhists call it your Buddha nature; for Hindus, it is Atman, the indwelling God." (Tolle, *A New Earth*, p. 70-71).

The god within

G.K. Chesterton: "Of all horrible religions the most horrible is the worship of the god within... That Jones shall worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones. Let Jones worship the sun or moon, anything rather than the Inner Light; let Jones worship cats or crocodiles, if he can find any in his street, but not the god within. Christianity came into the world firstly in order to assert that a man had not only to look inwards, but to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine captain. The only fun of being a Christian was that a man was not left alone with the Inner Light, but definitely recognised an outer light, fair as the sun, clear as the moon, terrible as an army with banners."

Bible vs. Buddhism

Bible	Buddhism
One life	Many lives
Revelation	Meditation
Personal God	Impersonal force
Desire is a fleeting pointer to God and greater pleasures	Desire is the source of all suffering; desire is to be snuffed out
Providence can't be predicted or controlled	Cause-and-effect karma determines all
Resurrection to eternal joy or punishment	Nirvana: escaping body and thought

Ecclesiastes 9:1-12

Providence, not predictability

¹ So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him.

Example: Joseph was in God's plan, but his life had lots of surprising twists (Genesis 37-50).

Unavoidable death

² All share a common destiny--the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them.

Life can be wasted

³ This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.

How can we escape madness? Nebuchadnezzar looked up to heaven, and his sanity was restored. Prodigal "came to himself" and went to his father.

When it's over, it's over

⁴ Anyone who is among the living has hope--even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! ⁵ For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and

even the memory of them is forgotten. ⁶ Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.

Facing four facts

- **Trust God's providence, not predictability.** God holds in his hand those who are in tune with him--but that's no guarantee that life will be easy or fun.
- **Death is unavoidable.** No matter who you are or what you do, death awaits you.
- **Life can be wasted.** People tend to waste their one life on evil and madness.
- **When it's over, it's over.** When you die, your earthly actions and hopes end.

You only live once!

- Enjoy what you have.
- Do what you can.
- Accept that you can't control everything.
- Be ready to meet your Maker.

Enjoy what you have

⁷ Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. ⁸ Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. ⁹ Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun--all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.

Enjoy everyday gifts

"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1).

"For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim 4:4-5).

Do what you can

¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. (Colossians 4:23-24)

Accept that you can't control everything

¹¹ I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all. ¹² Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.

Be ready to meet your Maker

Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. (Hebrews 9:27-28)

You only live once!

- Enjoy what you have.
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Resurrection, not reincarnation

If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." ... But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:32,57-58)