



But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. -

Matthew 15:9

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Life is More than Just a Bowl of Cereal

Recently I was handed the task of writing a short article that defines "life." At this point in time I won't share with you who gave me that job, but later I'll let you in on who the culprit is and why I was handed such a daunting task.

How do you define life? Can we really understand life?

My first step at finding an answer to the question of what defines life was to prayerfully cogitate. I felt a bit like Winnie the Pooh who sits and tells himself to "think, think, think" while trying to figure out a problem. All that was coming to mind was that I was trying to think.

Eventually it occurred that the definition of life might be to have a cognitive awareness. Would life simply be to have an awareness of some sort?

When Elkanah woke that morning I was waiting to ask him. His response was to speak to me in some foreign language that I don't know, but I was able to understand what he said: "I think therefore I am." That is a way to describe having awareness. Someone is able to think therefore he is a person.

But that answer alone didn't seem enough. I remembered a child I once met. He was 6 years old and still in diapers and a carrier. The child had been born brain dead yet his body lived and grew. When his mother wanted to go somewhere she had to carry this lifeless child with her. The doctor's said he had no awareness and his mother would agree with that, however, the child still lived and grew.

That child wasn't the only one who is considered to be brain dead yet they

continue to live. People will sometimes become sick or be involved in an accident that destroys the brain's ability to be aware and they are considered to be brain dead. Despite their diagnosis they continue to live in a vegetable state.

So there must be more to life than simply having awareness.

That brings up the question of when does life begin? Some say life begins at the moment of conception while others claim it begins at differing times. I have heard an SDA physician state that life doesn't begin until after the child is born and he takes his first breath. This doctor uses the story of creation to prove his point. [“Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. – Genesis 2:7 NIV”](#)

As a mother who has had miscarriages I am unable to agree with that particular teaching. My children were able to make it into my womb and attach themselves where they grew until something went terribly wrong.

All children who are in the womb are growing and have the ability to move. Sonogram images have shown some unborn children who were in the act of sucking their thumbs. When children are still in the womb they are with their mother 24/7. They learn to recognize her voice and touch. And while it is true that they aren't breathing while in the womb, they are still growing and have awareness.

While still in the womb a baby is in a place where he is unable to breathe for himself. His lungs don't develop until later in the pregnancy. If he were to try to breathe after his lungs developed yet he was still in the womb he would drown because instead of getting oxygen his lungs would fill with amniotic fluid. There isn't any oxygen in the womb for him to breathe. But that doesn't negate the fact that he is getting oxygen. His body wouldn't survive without it. An unborn child gets it's oxygen through the umbilical cord which is it's life support that comes from it's mother. His mother is doing the breathing for him. Also, I cannot understand how a child would need a form of life support, i.e., the umbilical cord, if the child wasn't alive.

So considering that the child is able to grow, move, and is aware of his mother, I cannot agree with the teaching that life begins at birth. I have to believe life begins at the moment of conception.

Perhaps the teaching that life exists only when there is breath is too literal. Consider the fish. If a fish stays out of water for too long it will die because it

cannot handle the air. Does teaching that life exists only where there is breath mean that fish aren't alive?

How many living things you have made, O Lord!
You have exhibited great skill in making all of them;
the earth is full of the living things you have made.
Over here is the deep, wide sea,
which teems with innumerable swimming creatures,
living things both small and large.
The ships travel there,
and over here swims the whale you made to play in it.

– Psalm 104:24-26

After thinking on this for several days I will admit that I am still stumped for an answer but despite that I have my answer. Life is something that we don't understand. God has not given us that information. But what we do know is that life is a gift from God. God is the only one who can grant life. He gave us the ability to procreate and reproduce, but ultimately the gift of life comes from our Creator.

When you stop and think about all the different life forms that we are aware of on this planet, we can be amazed at the massive intelligence it took to dream it all up. All the different plants and animals, whether they be airborne, land dwellers, or sea life, all gained their life from God.

And this is just another of life's mysteries. When the time comes that we can handle that kind of knowledge, God will give us what we need to know. As for me, I look forward to the day that I can meet and hold my currently deceased children. That is a joy I've anticipated for many years.

And with that I'll wish you a Happy Sabbath. I'll get to the task of attempting to write the article defining life.

Much love to all,

Hannah