

# SPIRITUAL VAGUENESS

It's a fact of contemporary British life that most people give little or no careful thought to the big questions of life: Who am I? Why are we here? Where am I going? Some people find the questions sneak up on them as they lie in the dark in their beds waiting for sleep, or perhaps in a late night conversation with friends over a drink, but very few set themselves to think through what they believe to any point of clarity. Most people have abandoned any hope of ever getting clarity on these questions, they live without any clear framework of meaning, direction or purpose. As I talk to people who profess to be Christians, even those who would be quite strong about it, I often find a similar vagueness about what that really means or entails. Given the surrounding culture, that's hardly surprising. And in many ways vagueness presents itself as a very attractive option.

On the one hand we're all aware at some level that the world can be a very dark and frightening place. It's not just distant wars and disasters. Depression and anxiety, uncertainty and emptiness can be found very close to home. A vague idea that God and Jesus are for real and will somehow 'watch over us and see us right' gives comfort and hope that can keep the scary questions at bay.

On the other hand, keeping our thoughts about God and Jesus suitably vague protects us from the possible implications for us if Jesus and his teaching came clearly into focus. Society, often with very good reason, has a very negative view of "religion". But even if we're able to separate out our thoughts about God and Jesus from all the toxic religious baggage that people have associated with them, we still know that Jesus may make big claims on our lives. Personal autonomy and freedom to pursue the lifestyle that culture tells us is the way to be truly human is a huge deal to us. That view whispers to us that there'll be conflict and sacrifice if we take Jesus too seriously. Best not to ask questions that could cause big trouble! But keeping things vague may well be a worse plan.

Firstly a negative reason. If we're vague about God and Jesus, then we have no way of knowing whether we actually have taken hold of the hope to which we aspire. Our vague hope may prove illusory. A vague thought that I renewed my car insurance is comforting until I have a crash. But once I've had a crash, a vague hope is useless. I need to know for sure that I'm insured, and I need to know how to appropriate that insurance. When it comes to the biggest questions of life: Does my life have a meaning and purpose? Am I actually reconciled to God? Does Jesus have my death covered? the stakes could not be higher. A day will come when we will find vagueness will be of no help to us.

Secondly, a positive reason. God wants to flood our lives with love and joy and peace through Jesus and through his Spirit. He longs to draw us into what he's doing in the world, to give us a life that's meaningful, purposeful and significant. He longs for our life to come into line with his life and with the purposes for which he created the world. Only then will the deeper questions of life begin to find some resolution in our minds, hearts and lives. But we cannot bring our lives into line with God's life if we remain vague about what that means or how that works.



In short, vagueness offers us at best an echo of reality and at worse something that can disastrously deceive us about the most important questions of our lives.

So if we want to come to a point of clarity, of not just vaguely hoping in Jesus but of taking hold of the fullness of life he holds out to us, we need to work out how to get there. Three thoughts on how to do this: Prayer, Bible and community.

Firstly, prayer. This isn't some bizarre ritual or formula. This is simply talking, openly, honestly and plainly to God. Jesus doesn't offer a philosophy and a moral code. He offers a real, intimate, personal, living connection to God. The most important thing, he said, was to love God. Any loving relationship built on trust requires two parties to communicate. If you really want to know God and Jesus, a great place to start is to tell him that and to ask for his help to find out what that means and how that works.

Secondly, the Bible. God knows how overwhelming the big questions are to us and so he's written down what it means to know him and relate to him and to find our place in his purposes and his world. The Bible is a big and deep book. It has been said that a child can paddle in it and a scholar can drown in it! I would suggest that you start with the gospels and try to get a feel for what Jesus is like and what kind of life he holds out.

Thirdly, community. Our society is very individualistic, but the Bible doesn't hold out an individual, private connection to God. It invites us to join the family of believers all around the world who are living with Jesus as their God and king. That's the context in which, together, we get to know God, to have our lives transformed, and to work out how to join in with what God is doing in his world.

