



EXCERPT



The Great Quest

Invitation to an Examined Life and a Sure Path to Meaning

March 22, 2022 | \$16, 132 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0424-1

O's Guinness invites us to examine our lives and join the great quest for meaning and a life well lived. Guinness charts the course of the thinking person's journey toward faith and meaning, calling for a firm grasp of reason, an honest awareness of conscience, and a living sense of wonder. He affirms that there is a time for questions, and that following those questions can indeed lead us to answers, evidence, and commitment.

Os Guinness and the Meaning of Life

The truth is that we humans cannot live without meaning any more than we can live without breathing, eating, and drinking. The will to live and the will to find meaning are one, and both are essential to our humanness. We all need to make sense of life. We all need to find security in the world. That's what gives each of us a story line in our lives. Sense, security, story line—without answers to such questions, meaninglessness becomes a serious problem and suicide a serious possibility.

"He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how," Nietzsche wrote in *Twilight of the Idols*. But there has to be a why. Intuitively, meaninglessness is unacceptable, even insufferable, to humans. In the dark, black night of Auschwitz, where there was no why to the horror of evil, psychiatrist Viktor Frankl found that some shred of meaning, however meager, was an absolute necessity for survival. Without it, his fellow inmates had no motivation to live when life was hell, and death seemed the only escape. Without at least that shred of meaning, they became "blanket cases." They took to their bunks, gave up, and died. Later, that central insight became the heart of Frankl's famous books *Man's Search for Meaning* and *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*.

Albert Camus wrote similarly in the celebrated opening words of his *Myth of Sisyphus*: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy." Camus didn't mean that we should all consider taking our lives. He was saying that it is only the deepest "why" and the toughest "why not" that keep us from refusing to give up on life when life becomes unbearable. The will to live and the reason why, or the meaning to live by, must never be separated.

Don't be put off by the disdain of the ivory tower or the scoffing of comedians. The meaning of life is too important to be left to philosophers or laughed out of court. How do we understand the realness of reality? Why do we prize human dignity or think that humans have an equal worth when nothing about us looks equal? Where do we anchor our sense of identity and purpose, and develop our understanding of right and wrong, and love? How do we "pursue happiness"? What is a "successful human being"? Why should we care for our neighbor and "the other"? What does the shortness of life, and the inevitability of death at the end of it, mean for the way we live? These questions matter, and none of them can be answered without an underlying sense of the overall meaning of life. We need meaning like we need a name and a sense of our own identity.

The point is not that each of us has to go off on our own, and we have to think through these questions all by ourselves and completely from scratch. That would be tedious and impossible. It's also unnecessary, because so many thinkers have raised and pursued the questions before us, so we can enter the ongoing conversation and come to our own conclusions. We do need to think it through for ourselves, though not by ourselves, and so make up our own minds.

The modern world is history's greatest alibi for careless living, but Socrates' challenge still stands: "The unexamined life is not worth living." Let's explore together what that might mean for the great quest for faith and meaning.

—Adapted from chapter one, "Invitation to an Examined Life"



Tara Burns, print and online publicity
800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or tburns@ivpress.com

Krista Clayton, author interviews
800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kclayton@ivpress.com



ivpress.com/media



BIO



The Great Quest

Invitation to an Examined Life and a Sure Path to Meaning

March 22, 2022 | \$16, 132 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0424-1

Os Guinness, Prolific Author and Social Critic

"For decades now, Os Guinness has served readers with excellent cultural analysis that helps us to 'read our times.'"

—Trevin Wax, senior vice president of theology and communications at Lifeway Christian Resources, author of *This Is Our Time*

Os Guinness (DPhil, Oxford) is the author or editor of more than thirty books, including *Last Call for Liberty*, *Impossible People*, *Fool's Talk*, *Renaissance*, *The Global Public Square*, *A Free People's Suicide*, *Unspeakable*, *The Call*, *Time for Truth*, and *The Case for Civility*. A frequent speaker and prominent social critic, he has addressed audiences worldwide from the British House of Commons to the US Congress to the St. Petersburg Parliament. He is a senior fellow at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics and was the founder of the Trinity Forum.

Born in China to missionary parents, he is the great-great-great-grandson of Arthur Guinness, the Dublin brewer. After witnessing the climax of the Chinese revolution in 1949, he was expelled with many other foreigners in 1951 and returned to England, where he was educated and served as a freelance reporter with the BBC. Since coming to the United States in 1984, he has been a guest scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Studies and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. He was the lead drafter of the Williamsburg Charter, celebrating the First Amendment, and has also been senior fellow at the EastWest Institute in New York, where he drafted the Charter for Religious Freedom. He also co-authored the public school curriculum *Living With Our Deepest Differences*.

Guinness has had a lifelong passion to make sense of our extraordinary modern world and to stand between the worlds of scholarship and ordinary life, helping each to understand the other—particularly when advanced modern life touches on the profound issues of faith. He lives with his wife, Jenny, in McLean, Virginia, near Washington, DC.



Tara Burns, print and online publicity
800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or tburns@ivpress.com

Krista Clayton, author interviews
800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kclayton@ivpress.com



ivpress.com/media