

Why Do We Yearn for Meaning?

"*Sehnsucht*" is a German word loosely translated as "longing," "pining" or "yearning," usually for a distant or unattainable ideal. It actually started out meaning a kind of suffering.

Psychology has used the term for human reaction to facets of life that are unfinished, and our own imperfections, and the desire to achieve completeness. But it's really a spiritual term. Composers like Schubert, Wagner and Beethoven were inspired by the concept.

C. S. Lewis discussed this idea in his book *Surprised by Joy*. U2 pursued the concept in their song "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For."

Biblical patriarchs like King David expressed the same thing:

Psalm 143:6 - "I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land."

Sehnsucht, though, is insatiable on this earth.

People need meaning and significance, even transcendence. If they don't find God, they usually spend their lives constructing and "worshipping" idols they hope will supply the transcendence they desire. But the ecstasy, if it is found, doesn't last.

At the same time, people are running and hiding from the real God who can provide what we all yearn for. But He usually has to "whack us up side of the head" before we pay attention.

I'm glad he did that with me.

I suffered several brushes with death - a serious car wreck at age 16, later falling over a waterfall in Colorado, stuck in freezing water until my cousin rescued me. At some point, I sort of stopped and thought, "Hmm. Something's going on here."

It was a pause, just long enough for God to pour into my life the sustenance I had been yearning for. Long story short, I was a Christian but experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in a new way. And it led me to realize the meaning of the cross, and the path to release myself to God.

Some folks experience this in a flash of instant revelation. Other folks just keep running until they're spent, and in their weakness God's strength is made perfect - without a whack on the head.

Bottom line: Let the yearning take you to the end of your rope.

Then you can simply stop running and tell God, "If you're there, quench this dissatisfaction and longing I feel!"

Just hang on, because God will reply, and "the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple" ...and take up residence in your heart (**Malachi 3:1**).