



Maximizing the Resources of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth for Existential Wellbeing

Author: Deborah Modupe AKANBI
Affiliation: Department of Kingdom Theology; Testament Theological Seminary, Makurdi
Email: voiceofdebra@gmail.com
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.8219957

Abstract

This paper aims to provide a modest process for tapping into the resources of the Kingdom of God and its values for Existential Well-being. Existential challenges have to do with matters of ultimate concerns which have no easy answers. This is problematic for the Believers' faith. The study examines the genesis of existential challenges in the world and the provisions in the work of redemption for reinstating mankind back to the Kingdom of God through the Word of God, Jesus Christ. An overview of existential well-being is done to increase our understanding of the concept across cultures. The work investigates the significance of the Kingdom of God on Earth to existential well-being through a critical appraisal of the rich resources of the Kingdom that a suffering individual could utilize in times of distress. The finding is that the Kingdom of God on Earth enlarges our capacity to survive and thrive during the changing seasons of life. The study concludes that the resources of Heaven promote our well-being and assist us in coping effectively with existential challenges.

Keywords: kingdom of God, existential well-being, existential challenges

Introduction

What is the significance of the Kingdom of God on earth and how can it provide answers for existential well-being? These are the overwhelming questions this paper seeks to examine. The question of existential challenges has to do with matters of ultimate concern which have no easy answers. Such challenges include Death, Finiteness, Limitations, Freedom and Responsibility, Isolation and Relatedness, Meaning and meaninglessness (Yalom Irvin, 1980). The available literature on Well-being Counselling reveals that the rich resources of the Kingdom of God are yet to be given enough consideration for coping with existential challenges. This study is divided into four sections. The first section expatiates the concept of Existential Well-being. In the second section, the study uses the Creation story to elucidate the origin of existential challenges and further examines the work of redemption for reinstating mankind back to the Kingdom of God on Earth. The second section is an overview of existential well-being and the common causes of existential challenges and how prayer links us with the Kingdom of God. Section three is a critical appraisal of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Section four highlights some Biblical resources of heaven that we could tap into for the sustenance of our well-being.

The Concept of Existential Wellbeing

Existential Well-being is a combination of two concepts—Existential and Well-being. The word existential is derived from existence and it is a technical term that is used in Existentialism. Existentialism is a philosophical movement that deals with the concrete experiences of life and our ability to cope with them. Thus, Existentialists address major themes that human beings go through in life and how they can cope with them. Hence, Existential refers to what it means to be in the fullest sense of the word. It considers individual existential givens as one of the factors underlying our well-being, and our ability to cope is one of the basic factors of existential well-being.

According to the National Wellness Institute, Halbert L. Dunn, MD (1896–1975), known as the "father of the wellness movement" made a distinction between good health as not being ill, and what he termed "high-level wellness" as "a condition of change in which the individual moves forward, climbing toward a higher potential of functioning" (Six Dimensions of Wellness n.d.). He also distinguished between health and well-being in his argument that health is a state of being, whereas well-being is a state of living.

In line with the foregoing explanations, Existential Well-being is a multidimensional way of living a balanced life in all the dimensions of wellness. The National Wellness Institute developed the Six Dimensions of Wellness model which are: Emotional, Physical, Intellectual, Occupational, Spiritual, and Social. This means that an individual must be intentional about creating meaning in all these dimensions by living life and existentially doing things. For instance, we should always ask ourselves what value are we adding to our existence, how solid are we in all the various dimensions of existence and how are we planning for uncertainties. Nevertheless, there is no universal concept of existential well-being because it deals with concrete life experiences.

For instance, the word existence in Yoruba thought means *Iwa laaye*, which means being fully alive. (The Yoruba is a major tribe in Nigeria, West Africa). Fayemi & Ogunkoya, 2013 uses the concept of 'Iwa lesin' to describe human existence in Yoruba. They rendered Existence as religion and Existence as commitment. This is why the Yoruba usually pray that God would not make them exist like someone whose existence lacks meaning in the world. To them, when an individual is deeply troubled or experiences misfortune, it is due to the following predicaments:

Idamu – confusion

Adanwo – adversity

Ajalu – misfortunes like accidents, famine, flood, fire incidents

Akoba – an experience of suffering for an offence that a person knows nothing about

In this line of thought, well-being, for the Yoruba, entails not only flourishing but also peace of mind. Generally, Africans believe that the slightest threat to an individual's survival is to be addressed before it becomes overwhelming. They do not only pray to avert misfortunes, they also believe in spiritual acts like appeasements and rituals to their deities for supernatural protection. As Believers, our theology teaches us not to worship or serve other gods or deities.

The Origin of Existential Challenges

(a) The Fall of Man

In the story of the Creation, God used to visit the Garden of Eden to relate with mankind face to face. That relationship indicates that the atmosphere of heaven pervaded the earth in the beginning. The Garden had everything that mankind could ever need for his existential well-being. Apart from that, there was neither suffering nor death in the Garden, but, mankind was given the norms for living:

Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (Gen 2:15–

17, NKJV).¹

Firstly, mankind was responsible for tending and keeping their Garden of life. Tending and keeping a garden means attending to every detail that would make the garden grow and flourish. They have the autonomy to be in control with the moral instruction that they should not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That tree was a test of mankind's power of autonomy. Autonomy affirms our capacity to act according to the objective moral standard for living.

Secondly, living in the Garden of Eden came with freedom, choice, and responsibility. That normative question addresses what is right or wrong as citizens of the Garden. In this context, freedom is regarded as free will, however, with free will comes the responsibility to bear the consequences in case of wrong actions. The famous saying of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a social contractarian, attests to this. According to him, "Man is born free, and he is everywhere in chains" (Rousseau, 1893: 2). What this means is that for every freedom, there are checks and balances.

Correspondingly, freedom, choice, and responsibility are some of the core themes of Existentialism. Adam and Eve acted in "bad faith".

Bad faith is the possibility which consciousness possesses of waving back and forth demanding the privileges, yet seeking refuge from the responsibilities of freedom by pretending to be concealed and confined in an already established Ego (Sartre, 1984: xv).

Sartre's argument depicts the wavering attitude of Adam and Eve. They were already established in the Garden by God, but they became disorganized and confused when they discovered that they had been deceived. Unfortunately, they were punished and banished from their habitat of "Heaven on Earth", into the kingdom of this world which is under the influence of Satan and his fallen angels. Since then, existential challenges like suffering, pain, and other negative experiences entered into mankind's existence. Be that as it may, God put enmity between mankind and the serpent (Gen 3:15). The reason for that was for the redemption of mankind so that man would be redeemed and reinstated back into his original state of abundant life, righteousness, peace, and joy.

(b) Implications of the Fall of Man

Tracing the problem from Creation, when mankind fell out with God, it was a sell-out to the enemy. The implication is that "when subjects give themselves out, it is on a condition that their goods should be taken (Rousseau, 1893: 6). In that regard, the Serpent took over to steal the good things that God gave to mankind at the beginning of Creation. That was why Jesus said "The thief does not come except to steal, kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). In line with this statement, a deficiency in abundant life could cause existential challenges.

(c) Other Causes of Existential Challenges

Existential challenges as problems that make life hopeless or meaningless. Hence, existential challenges are experiences of life that could be described as a loss of meaning, a state of internal turmoil, a thorn in the flesh, or, a walk through the shadow of death. They could also be referred to as sudden misfortunes that befall an individual to the extent that the individual starts to feel as if life is not worth living. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to comment that not all challenges are existential. Moreover, Existentialists believe that if you are responsible, you can still make meaning out of your life.

Challenges become existential when an individual starts to lose the meaning of existing. That was the kind of challenge that John the Baptist faced when he sent his disciples to seek Jesus for answers. He asked: "Are you the Coming One or do we look for another?" (Matt 11:3). Such problems have led people to question the existence of God and also doubt if their belief system is still working for them.

Furthermore, the causes of existential challenges include the flux of the world, problems of identity, personal

¹ The New King James Version (NKJV) will be used throughout this work.

mistakes, and spiritual wickedness. To demonstrate that unforeseeable circumstances do occur unannounced, Ancient Greek Philosopher, Heraclitus (540-480 BCE) postulated that the world is in ceaseless flux and everything is subject to changes. This is the truth of life as we experience continual changes in ecology, political systems, leadership, relationships, and so forth. Likewise, the problems of Identity like racial and ethnic discrimination, the feeling of homelessness in another country, and lack of acceptance by colleagues in the workplace could also jeopardize human well-being. At times, there is a need to look beyond these external factors because our mistakes could result in challenges. Thus, we should as much as possible avoid wrong decisions, negative attitudes like unforgiveness, ingratitude, wrong associations, and neglect to take good care of ourselves. Most importantly, there is the problem of spiritual wickedness. Spiritual wickedness is even scarier, for “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).

In the context of this statement, we could trace the spiritual source of our existential challenges to the activities in four invisible dimensions known as principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of our times and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Concluding the influence of the invisible, we are enjoined to put on the whole armour of God so that we may be able to withstand the enemy praying always with all manner of prayer and supplications and with all perseverance (Eph 6: 12, 14–18).

(d) God’s Plan of Redemption

After the fall of mankind, God dissolved the friendship between the Seed of the Woman and the serpent. God said, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed, He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel”. (Gen 3:15). Theologians describe God’s redemptive action as Protoevangelium.² This term is also referred to as the Good News of Salvation as it reminds us that any time we are being harassed by the enemy, the head of the serpent has been crushed. It follows that the Good News entails not only redemption but also, victory, breakthroughs and a better future for Believers who are suffering from any form of existential challenges.

Prophecies on God’s plan of redemption feature prominently in the Book of Isaiah. Some of them are highlighted below:

- i. But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine (Is 43:1).
- ii. You shall no longer be termed Forsaken. You shall no more be termed Desolate; You shall be called Hephzibah and your land Beulah! Say to the Daughter of Zion, surely your Salvation is coming; Behold, His reward is with Him and his work is with him, And they shall call them the Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord, you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken (Is 62:11–12).
- iii. Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. (Is 47:19).

Remarkably, John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is symbolic that John started his ministry in the wilderness of Judea. Also, God made a road that led the disciples and converts of John to hear the message of repentance and the preparation for the coming of the Kingdom of God on Earth. The Kingdom of God eventually came on Earth through Jesus Christ, but the Jews did not believe in His message. John 1 introduced Him as “the Word” as well as the Co-creator with God from the beginning. That description was strange to them and they found it extremely difficult to change their mindset and embrace the New Beginning that had earlier been prophesied.

² Protoevangelium is a Greek word: The prefix ‘proto’ means before and ‘evangelion’ means ‘the good news’ or ‘gospel’. See “The Protoevangelium” www.ligonier.org/learn/devotion.

The Kingdom of God on Earth: A Critical Analysis

A Kingdom is a territory that is ruled by a monarch who has authority over the citizens. On this basis, the Kingdom of God is the territory of God where God rules supreme with all Authority. The Kingdom of God is a spiritual Kingdom as well as the inward spiritual centre of life by itself in connection with its external visible embodiment (Vos 2013). The Kingdom of God on Earth is a Kingdom that is under the right authority, a country that is characterized by peace, order, and freedom, and where every person's value and significance are recognized (Munroe, 2016). God's Kingdom is His Reign, His Rule, never His domain. It is an actual country with its government, laws, culture, and citizenry. And unlike earthly kingdoms of men, the Kingdom of Heaven is an eternal Kingdom (Vos, 2013).

These definitions are some of the various interpretations of the Kingdom of God which means that the authors are yet to agree on what exactly is the Kingdom of God. The simplest definition is that the Kingdom of God is the Divine Spiritual Kingdom of the Creator of Heaven and Earth and everything – including mankind – that is in the universe. Psalm 24:1 confirms this: “The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein”.

The concrete presence of the Kingdom of God on Earth was to come through the work of Redemption that God started after the fall of mankind. The Gospel of John gives an account of how the Kingdom came through Jesus Christ. According to Robertson (2016), John's account is not to be taken literally but should be analysed in its historical and contextual account. Robertson wants us to take into consideration that John's Gospel was written to fill a gap that the writers before him left out. The other Gospels have shown Jesus to be the Saviour, the Messiah, the Son of God born of the Virgin Mary, and the Son of Man, both Divine and Human but they did not tell us the full account of how the Kingdom of God was restored on the Earth.

John laid down his thesis in the Prologue of the Gospel to the effect that the Logos or Word, the Eternal Son of God was not only with God in the Pre-Incarnate state, was also God, and that the Logos who was God became flesh and dwelt among men, who beheld his glory and testified of His Power (page 23).

The foregoing shows that the Kingdom of God has been restored to the Earth through the Logos with its Creative Power, and the Divine and Eternal Light. John confirmed that the disciples and others witnessed the glory and power of the Kingdom of God and those who accepted Jesus and believed in His Name are given the power to become children of God.

The purpose of this analysis is to illustrate the significance of the Kingdom of God on Earth in times of challenges. The Kingdom of God on the Earth remains with the children of God through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Helper, whom Jesus said that the Father will send in His Name. “. . . He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). St. Paul taught us to embody the Holy Spirit in I Cor. 6:19 which states: “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have of God and you are not your own?”. Little wonder why Jesus empowered his disciples with the Holy Spirit. “He breathed on them and said: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22). It follows that the children of God who have received the Breath of the Holy Spirit have been empowered anew with the Breath of God for living in the Kingdom. In this way, the Holy Spirit is the ontological foundation of our New Birth in Jesus Christ.

Through the Holy Spirit, our being should change from sinful nature into the nature of the children of God so that our lives would be attuned with the glorious Life in Christ. This requires a complete change of thinking and mindset that leads to a new way of being. It is not about what we do, it is about how we live our lives. It then follows that we begin to care for our Spiritual well-being along with other dimensions of our existence. If not, our lives will be unbalanced.

Other resources of the Kingdom of God on the Earth could be found in the demonstration of Power and Authority which are portrayed in the activities of Jesus Christ, while He walked the Earth. For brevity, some of them are highlighted under the major themes of existential challenges:

Death, Finiteness, Limitations

- Healing of the Woman with the issue of blood for twelve years (Luke 8:43–48)

- Healing of the centurion's paralyzed servant through Logos (Matt 8:5–13)
- Jesus rebuked the wind and said to the sea, Peace be still. And the wind ceased and there was a great calm (Mark 4:39)
- Jesus raises Lazarus from the Dead (John 11:28–44)

Isolation and Relatedness

- The miracle of grace in the life of the Samaritan woman (John 4:1–28)

Meaning and Meaninglessness

- The miracle of the conversion of the Samaritans. “And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the Word of the woman who testified”. They not only believed, they also confessed that indeed, this is the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (John 4:45)

Freedom and Responsibility

- Jesus sets the adulterous woman free and commanded her to go and sin no more (John 8:31)

Power over Nature

- Jesus rebuked the wind and said to the sea, Peace be still. And the wind ceased and there was a great calm (Mark 4:39)

It is imprudent for this study to list all the activities of Jesus Christ when the people were facing existential challenges. However, we must not lose sight of how to have access to these rich resources. Jesus emphasized the role of Prayer and taught his disciples a model prayer that they could use at all times and in all seasons:

*Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen (Matt 6:9–13).*

In addition to Prayer, Jesus also emphasized the importance of Faith and Fasting when he healed the epileptic boy. The disciples went to Him and asked how that was possible. Jesus said to them: “Because of your unbelief, for assuredly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed you will say to the mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move and nothing shall be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.’ (Matt 17:20–21).

The point we are making is that we are yet to take advantage of the benefits that the Kingdom of God grants to us as the “children of the Kingdom”. Also, we should be responsible enough to play our role in the work of Salvation and Deliverance. By this, we exercise our Freedom responsibly as expected by the Existentialists. More importantly, we act responsibly by being open to the Word, that is, Logos. This submission is corroborated by the remark made by Jesus when the centurion asked him to speak the Word for the healing of his servant as he believed that the Word carries the Power and Authority of the Kingdom of God on the Earth. Jesus marvelled at his great faith and felt sorry for those who were meant to be “sons of the Kingdom” and continued to neglect the resources that God had kept in store for them in times of challenges. From the foregoing, the significance of the Kingdom of God on Earth is the provisions it contains for our salvation, healing, and resilience.

Conclusion

This discourse explores the significance of the Kingdom of God on earth to existential well-being. The work traces the origin of existential challenges from the time of Creation and carries an exploration into becoming re-instated into the Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ. The work examines the origin of existential challenges by exploring the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden and the work of Redemption for the reinstatement of children of God back into the Kingdom that was lost after the fall. The study defines Existential Well-being what it means in other climes and cultures and how people take proactive actions against misfortunes. A critical analysis was carried out to show the significance of the Kingdom of God on

Earth in times of challenges. The significance of the Kingdom of God on Earth is the provisions it contains for our Salvation, healing, and resilience to cope with existential challenges. The finding is that the Kingdom of God on Earth enlarges our capacity to survive and thrive during the changing seasons of life, and empowers suffering individuals to take authority over their challenges through the power of the Holy Spirit. The work submits that the resources of Heaven promote our well-being and assist us in coping effectively with existential challenges. The study adds to Kingdom education on Existential Well-being.

Bibliography

- Binswanger, Ludwig. *Being-in-the-world*. Translated by J. Needleman. New York: Basic Books, 1963.
- Fayemi, Ademola K., and Ogunkoya, Oladotun J. *The Concept of 'Iwa-lesin' in Yoruba Thought: Implications for Development in Nigeria*. Amoye: JAP&S 1 (2013) 1 -12. 2013.
- Gushee, David P. and Stassen, Glenn H. *Kingdom Ethics*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016.
- Munroe, Myles. *The Principles and Power of Kingdom Citizenship*. Destiny Image. PA: Shippensburg, 2016.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Translated by Shawn Eyer. Plumbstone Books, 2016.
- Robertson, A. T. *The Divinity of Christ in the Gospel of John*. New York: F. B. & C Ltd., 2015.
- Rogers, Carl. *A Way of Being*. New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1980.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract*. Translated by Harrington R.M. London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1983.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being & Nothingness*. USA: Washington Square Press, 1984.
- Six Dimensions of Wellness Defining and Assessing Wellness the National Wellness Institute's How Will You Choose to Activate High-Level Wellness?" n.d.
<https://cdn.ymaws.com/members.nationalwell.org/resource/resmgr/tools2/6dimensionsassessmnt.pdf>.
- van Deurzen, Emma. *Everyday Mysteries: Existential Dimensions of Psychotherapy*. London: Sage, 1997.
- 'Vos, Geerhardus. *The Teachings of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church*. USA: American Tract Society, 2013.
- Yalom, Irvin D. *Existential Psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books, 2020.

Rev. Dr. Deborah Modupe Akanbi is a graduate of the University of Lagos, Nigeria where she obtained her MA and PhD in Philosophy. She currently serves as the Chair of the School of Kingdom Theology, Testament Theological Seminary. She is passionate about investigating fundamental questions that stimulate personal transformation and spiritual development. She facilitates Biblical Existential Well-being Mastery Course across Nigeria and Overseas.