Life’s Dead Ends
A 4-part Series

Leader’s Overview

Introduction to Series:

Life is an interesting thing. You can't hold it in your hands or put it in a bottle, but you know it's there. Life is what enables us to move these bodies and think thoughts, but no one can figure out why life leaves the body after 70 or 80 years. All life was put on earth by God and, ever since, man has been trying to find ways to make it longer, to make it last. The ultimate quest for man is to find a way so that life never ends ... so that life is fulfilling and complete. The funny thing is that long ago, God -- the one who created life in the first place, told very clearly what our life is here for, and the way to make it last forever. But, for some reason, man has called God a liar, and has set out to find his own path to make life last.

All of us are searching for something; some way we can find fulfillment in our life. God has warned us that the only way to make life a permanent thing is by following His path and His way, but most of the world around us is running down other paths, looking for a way to make life last. And they say they've found it ... a road that, when traveled, leads to real fulfillment in life. But, everyone who buys it and travels down that road, comes to a terrifying fact -- it's a dead end. It doesn't work! It doesn't actually give fulfillment.

Editor’s Note:

This series has been written specifically to be used as an evangelistic series. It is built around four things that young people pursue, mistakenly believing they can find real purpose in life. Each leads into a time to share Christ and invite students to trust Him personally.

The topics are:

1) Looking for Life in All the Wrong Places
2) How Money Can Rob You Blind
3) A Life of Leisure?
4) Fame and "Success"
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Part 1 - Looking For Life In All The Wrong Places

Statements of Purpose: To show students that the world's picture of sex and physical pleasure as the fulfilling element of life is a lie, and that the only way to be fulfilled as a living person is through a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Theme: Dead End #1 - Real life is found in sensual pleasure.

Opening Illustration: Choose 3 or 4 songs by popular artists or bands (that follow the theme), and copy down the lyrics for the students to read. Ask them to respond to what the songs are teaching.

Bible Lesson:

This may surprise you, but God has a lot to say about sensual pleasure. He knows very clearly what it means to be sexually excited, and the pleasure that it brings. Why? Because He invented it for us. That's right. The Bible is full of passages where God says He created sex as a powerful, fantastic, fun thing for human beings to enjoy.

But, here's the problem: God created sensual pleasure to be used within His bounds. He has rules for it to really be fulfilling. But man has looked for a way to make life work apart from God, and claims to have found it in physical pleasure. Man has taken the gift God gave and blown it out of proportion, and said, "This is what life is for." That's what the songs we looked at are saying: "Physical pleasure is what life is for, so get as much as you can, and you will feel fulfilled." The Bible said that would happen. 2 Tim.3:4 says the most perverted days of history would be characterized by men who are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." Romans 1:23-24 says that man goes his own way (and God lets him), and the result is that men look for pleasure so much that they turn to homosexuality and other sensual perversions. Paul described the world looking for the meaning of life and thinking they have found it in physical pleasure. He said, in Ephesians 4:18, that they are "darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their hearts; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness."

The world has taken a good gift that God gave and has said, "Hey, this is what life is all for! It feels so good, it can't be wrong! This is what gives you life!" And, you know, they're almost believable. Because sensual pleasure does feel good. It does give you mountain-top feelings. But God, the one who created it, has said it's not what life is for. The world has perverted what it's for. And God put a consequence on this misuse of His gift. It's almost as if God foresaw that men would take it and claim it gives life, and said, "Just in case you think that, there's a consequence to misusing it that will show you that physical pleasure by itself can never give you life." He made it so that sensual actions don't give lasting fulfillment.

Do you know what happens to those people who buy the lie, and start living for sensual pleasure? Down inside, God created them so that they start feeling more and more empty. The more you use it to get fulfillment, the less real fulfillment sensual pleasure brings. We're designed that way so we'll realize that it's really not what life is for.
Listen to the story of a man who bought the lie. After divorce he decided that the way to a fulfilled, exciting life was sensual pleasure and sexual "freedom." But he found it wasn't like the movies and songs promise:

"I've really got it made. I'm free from the attachments of marriage. I've got this great condo at the beach and I go to bed with one sexy gal after another. I come and go as I please and I do my own thing. But something is really bothering me and I can't figure it out. Every morning as I get dressed for work I look into the mirror and I think, 'What was last night all about? Sure the girl was good-looking. She was good in bed and she left this morning without bugging me, but is that all there is in life?' I asked myself, 'If this life-style is what every guy thinks he wants, why am I so depressed? Why do I feel a cold nothingness all the time?'" (Joyce Landorf, Tough and Tender).

He thought sensuality would bring him freedom, but he found out it was actually a trap. God made it that way, so we would see that physical pleasure isn't primarily what life is for at all. It gives no freedom. It is a dead end. Proverbs 2:18-19 describes this path as one which sinks down to death: "... None who go to her return again, nor do they reach the paths of life." One who follows the lie is likened to "An ox going to the slaughter, or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool" (Prov. 7:22). God warns that this path "is the way to Sheol, descending to the chambers of death" (Prov. 7:27). The pictures painted on TV, in the movies, in the songs, make the path look beautiful and pleasurable. But God says it's a lie. It's a dead end. It'll never give you real life. Instead, Colossians 3:2 says that it will result in the "wrath of God" coming on those who believe it. Peter said claiming that sensual pleasure gives fulfilling life is a lie which "wars against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). Look at the wasted, deteriorated lives of those who tried it and you'll know he's right. Venereal diseases plague them, they marry and divorce countless times, but "happiness" eludes them, and the honest ones admit that they have a constant, deep ache of loneliness and lack of fulfillment. Sensual pleasure is very inviting, but outside of God's rules, it is a dead end, and it results in destruction.

If it doesn't work, what does? What is life for? How can someone really get fulfilled in life? God says there's only one way . . . through a personal relationship with Him where He has forgiven your sins and made you His own, personal child. That can only happen if you repent of the dead ends you've been following and turn to trust in Jesus Christ alone as your Savior from sin.

Jesus is the one who created the life that is inside your body right now, and He offers us the only way to make it full, and to make it last forever. He offers us a relationship with Himself. By coming in humble belief that He alone can give us life, and by trusting His payment for our sins through His death on the cross, He promises us a life that never ends.

Concluding Activity: Invitation to salvation.
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Part 2 - How Money Can Rob You Blind

Statements of Purpose: To show that materialism and wealth, as the reason for life, is a dead end. It never truly fulfills the reason for living. Only a relationship with Christ can do that.

Theme: Dead End #2 - Money/Materialism as a Dead End.

Introductory Paragraph:

America is still the richest country in the world. The average annual income here dwarfs the standard of living anywhere else on earth. Our wealth is something we really enjoy, but it also is a real curse.

Life is that strange thing that you can't put in a bottle or hold in your hands, but that's there inside you, making your body move. You don't see it when it leaves, and we really don't know how to make it stay. But everybody alive wants to find a way to make life stay, to make it last, and to make it enjoyable. We've seen how physical pleasure is grabbed hold of by people, and how they say, "This, this is what life is for." But it's a dead end. Now we're going to see another dead end -- wealth, money and materialism.

Opening Activity:

Bring in several current business magazines, such as Inc., Business Week, Forbes, etc. Divide the group into smaller sections, each with a couple magazines to leaf through. Ask them to pick out ads or headlines which promote the idea that money and wealth is what brings real happiness, ease, or fulfillment in life. After they have compiled them have a spokesman from each section show them to the group and explain how the ad teaches that mentality.

Bible Lesson:

Everybody's trying to sell you on the fact that what you have, how much money you make, or what kind of job you have is what makes you a significant person. Whether you want to admit it or not, most of us have swallowed it as true. Just look at how we live. We wear designer clothes and drive designer cars and get designer haircuts. And most of our young people graduating from high school are choosing professions and colleges almost solely because of how much money it'll help them make. We think, "If I can only be well-off, then I'll be happy. Then life will be worthwhile."

But there's bad news. It doesn't work. It's a dead end! Money is a deceiver, and it'll never, ever fulfill your reason for being on earth. The Bible records the words of a man who tried that very thing and found out the hard way: Solomon, the king of Israel. This guy had it made. But he felt empty inside. He didn't know what would fill up his deep need to know what life was for. And so he bought the lie that wealth would do it. But look at what he said. In Ecclesiastes 2:4-10, he says he added real estate and slaves and livestock, and he coveted silver and gold, and "all that his eyes desired he did not refuse." This man was loaded. He had beach houses in Malibu and penthouses in Manhattan; he had all the wining and dining he wanted. But Solomon made a discovery.
Read Ecclesiastes 2:11

After everything he had, Solomon said it didn't answer the question, "What is this life for?" And he explains why. Later on in that chapter he says (vs. 14), "The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both." In other words, money won't keep your body from deteriorating, and after just a few years your health will break down, and you will die, and the life will leave your body exactly like it leaves a poor man's body. And then what? No difference. Your life passes into eternity and all the wealth on earth is useless.

Later on Solomon says, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money" (Ecclesiastes 5:10). It can't preserve that life which is inside of you right now. Solomon found it out. And so has everyone who thinks it's the reason for living. Howard Hughes, one of the richest men who ever lived, died of malnutrition, eating Twinkies in his penthouse. Where is he now? How is his money helping him now?

As messed up as the Beatles were, they once sang a song which made a lot of sense. In their song, "Can't Buy Me Love," the words said, "Say you don't need no diamond ring, and I'll be satisfied. Tell me that you want those other things that money just can't buy. I don't care too much for money. Money can't buy me love."

Maybe we could change it to make it more appropriate, and say, "Money can't buy me life."

If life on earth isn't affected by money; if wealth is a dead end to finding fulfillment, then what does extend life? What is the reason you have life inside of you, causing your body to function right now? The Bible says that your life was put there by God, for the purpose of having a relationship with Him and enjoying Him forever. That's what your life has been put here for. And no other thing can fulfill it. Real life comes only by a relationship with God through faith in His Son's work on the cross. Only by entrusting your life to Jesus Christ can you be forgiven for sin and brought into a relationship with your creator which will give you eternal life.

**Concluding Activity:** Invitation for salvation.
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Part 3 - A Life of Leisure?

Statement of Purpose: To show students that the mentality of entertainment and leisure escape from reality as the chief end in life is a dead end, and that a relationship with God through Christ is the only true way to find a reason for living.

Theme: Dead End #3 - Entertainment and leisure (escape from reality) is a dead end.

Introductory – Paragraph and Opening Activity:

What do you suppose the biggest market item was for Americans last year? (Choose a hot-selling item from the entertainment industry and give some brief sales statistics)

Take a poll: Out of those present, how many;

- Have a (previously-mentioned item) in their home?
- Surf the web two or more hours a day?
- Have the TV on more than three hours per day in their home?

Leisure and entertainment is the biggest desire of a vast number of Americans. The average American puts in his eight hard hours of work every day, kept going only by the dream of getting home, kicking back in his recliner, and watching TV for 4, 5, or 6 hours. Early retirement, Pacific cruises, spring break vacations, movie-channels, DVDs, radio, video games, the list goes on and on. Why?

Man is looking for life ... an explanation for why there is life on this planet, and why there is that strange thing called life in our bodies. We can't hold it in our hands or put it in a jar, and we can't see it, but it's in there, making these bodies move. And for some reason, after 70 or 80 years, it leaves the body. Man is frantically trying to find something, anything, to make life stay in the body longer, and to give fulfillment to life -- a reason for being alive.

One way they've tried is to look at entertainment and leisure. And they've pointed to it and said, "That! That's it! That's what life is here for." But God says, "No, that's not what life is for." It's a dead end. It can never give fulfillment.

Bible Lesson:

Why do you suppose people spend so much time and money getting themselves entertained? (Responses here might be interesting.) Why do you suppose American young people are so heavily involved in drugs?

Actually, entertainment and drugs accomplish the same thing. They allow us a chance to escape; to get away from real life. Why? Real life is full of failures and hurts, let-downs and hard-times. Real life isn't fair
sometimes; it's hard to be alive. And the worst part about it is, we don't know what we're alive for. What
difference does it make that I'm living? What am I here for? Who put me here? What's going to happen to me
when I get old, or when I die? We can't figure out what real life is all about or how to make it pleasurable. So
we try to run away from it. We try to escape. And entertainment -- whether it's in the form of music, movies,
books, or drugs -- gets our minds off those questions. It gives us relief. It deludes us into thinking that we're
okay; that we're going to make it; that there's a peaceful escape to life.

But there's a problem. No matter how much we entertain ourselves, or escape from reality, it is impossible to
totally escape. Eventually we have to come back to real life. And the escape is a dead end. It only puts off what
we eventually must face. It doesn't give any meaning to life. There is not peace in our real life.

In the Old Testament, just before God brought destruction on the nation of Judah, He warned them that they
were stupidly trying to escape from reality. In real life they needed to turn in faith to the One who created them.
But the Bible records that they denied real life, and tried to escape from the fact that they were headed for
destruction.

Read Jeremiah 5:11

The book of Jeremiah describes several ways in which the people tried to "escape" reality, and some of them are
very similar to our entertainment and leisure today. God warned them that real life was moving closer to
destruction, but just like us in our leisure, they paid no attention.

Read Jeremiah 6:10

The entertainment world and the life of drugs tries to tell us, "If you just close out the world, don't listen to
reality, it will go away."

But the demand on us as created, living beings will not go away. And a life of "escape" is only a dead end,
because eventually you must deal with why you do have life in your body, and where it is headed. And if you
wait until God's judgment comes, escape is impossible and eternal destruction is your payment. God said to
Judah in Jeremiah 6:11… (Read verse)

Jesus said that the end result of trying to escape from reality is destruction for eternity.

Read I John 3:18

You and I are given a chance to understand what we have life for, and to respond in faith to God's way to make
it last forever. If you try to escape through entertainment, or leisure, or drugs, you are only running down a dead
end street, because sometime you must face the reality of why your life is on earth; and the only way to make it
last forever and be fulfilled is by coming to a personal relationship with the ONE who put it here.

Closing Activity: Invitation to salvation.
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Part 4 - Fame and "Success"

Statement of Purpose: To show students that attaining fame and success in life will never fulfill their reason for being alive. It will never prolong their life, nor fulfill it. Only a relationship with the Creator of life can touch that deep need.

Theme: Dead End #4 - Fame and "Success" is a Dead End.

Introductory Paragraph:

The world offers us a lot of "dead ends" -- lifestyles which, they claim, will fulfill us entirely and show us the reason life has been put inside these bodies. Mankind, you and I included, is constantly searching for the reason why life is on earth, and why that strange thing called "life" has been put inside these bodies, making them move right now. We want to know why it's here, and how to make it last. The final dead end we're going to look at is especially true in America. And even though God, the One who created the life in us, has told us the answer, many, many of us run down this road and say, "This, this is the road to life." But it's a dead end. The final dead end, the road many of you may be on right now, is the idea that fame or success is the reason for living.

Basic Lesson:

The desire for success, influence, or "fame" is a road that many of us believe leads to meaning in life. Why do you suppose so many of us work so hard to compete in sports, scholastics, music, or in other areas? We're driven to "be the best" because when you're "the best," you have a reason for living. When MaryLou Retton, gold medal gymnast, was so highly publicized in the Olympics, registration for gymnastics lessons reached an all-time high. One U.S. Olympic swimmer -- Steve Lundquist -- pouted even though he had just won a gold medal. Why? He had not broken the world record. All over our country, we're driven to be the best, the greatest, smartest, fastest, richest, or even the most bizarre, craziest or radical. Why? Because we buy the lie that being noticed will provide a meaning to life.

Look at our professional athletes today. They're driven to be the best, to hold the record, to get paid the most. Or look at our Hollywood stars. They try to be the sexiest, the most popular, the most beautiful; and some absolutely blow their money and ruin their lives because of the drug dependence it takes to keep up the pace of a "star." Look at America's top business executives. They work and slave and climb the company ladder, many working 12, 14, 16 hours a day, driven to reach the top. And look at some of us. Driven to be the best basketball player, or the best student, or the most popular person, or the rowdiest partier. Why? Down inside, we believe that there is life in it; that that kind of fame or status will fulfill our reason for living.

But our creator, God Himself, has bad news. It's a dead end. It will never extend our lives, and it'll never give true satisfaction to life.
A perfect example is a guy in the Bible -- Solomon. He went through a period of time when he also thought the thing which brought him happiness was being the best, the most looked up to, the most powerful. And he was successful. By the world's standards he had fame above all others. He had become a successful businessman, amassing billions of dollars worth of assets. He was famous for being the wisest man on earth. He would have been on the cover of everything from “Time” to “Rolling Stone”. But Solomon made a discovery.

Read Ecclesiastes 2:21

Solomon realized that as shrewd, famous, and successful as he got, when his life ended all the glory he received would soon be left behind, and someone who followed him, who didn't work for it at all, would spend his money and receive his glory. And what would he have? Nothing!

Look at what else Solomon discovered…

Read Ecclesiastes 2:22-23

The man who thinks success in business is the source of real life works and slaves and pushes himself, and what's the result? Pain in his body and no rest, and for the hope that maybe someone will think he's great. Instead he gets ulcers and heart attacks, and he lies awake at night worrying about life, and in the process wrecks his marriage and doesn't know his kids. And just like the rest of the world, life eventually leaves his body, and his life has been for nothing. He has nothing. A dead end.

Olympic athletes train for hours and hours, every day for years and years, for the hope of winning it all. And their days are grievous and hard and no fun. And after the medals are passed out, what do they have? Nothing! A dead end.

Maybe you have bit into the lie that fame, being the best at something will give you a reason for living; will give you life. It's a dead end. It will never work. Solomon found out, and you know what his conclusion was?

Read Ecclesiastes 12:13

Listen to God! Follow His way, because He's the only one who knows what your life is here for, and He's the only one who can fulfill your reason for living.

Closing Activity: Invitation to salvation.