

We Start With...

A two minute period of silence - a moment of peace.

Our Next Meeting

An introduction will be given to the views of Jordan Peterson, a 56-year-old Canadian clinical psychologist and professor of psychology as expressed in his *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*.

The book is divided into chapters with each title representing a specific rule for life explained in an essay. The founding idea is that "suffering is built into the structure of being," but although it can be unbearable, people have a choice either to withdraw, which is a "suicidal gesture", or to face and transcend it. However, living in a world of chaos and order, each human being has "darkness" which can "turn them into the monsters they're capable of being" to satisfy their dark impulses in right situations. The scientific experiments like *Invisible Gorilla Test* show that perception is adjusted to aims, and it is better to seek meaning rather than happiness. Peterson noted that "it's all very well to think the meaning of life is happiness, but what happens when you're unhappy? Happiness is a great side effect. When it comes, accept it gratefully. But it's fleeting and unpredictable. It's not something to aim at – because it's not an aim. And if happiness is the purpose of life, what happens when you're unhappy? Then you're a failure".

The book advances the idea that people are born with the instinct for ethics and meaning and should take responsibility to search for meaning above their own interests. Such thinking is reflected in great contemporary stories such as *Pinocchio*, *The Lion King* and *Harry Potter* or ancient stories from the *Bible*. To "Stand up straight with your shoulders

back" (title of first chapter) is to "accept the terrible responsibility of life", to make self-sacrifice, because the individual must rise above victimization and "conduct his or her life in a manner that requires the rejection of immediate gratification, of natural and perverse desires alike". The comparison to neurological structures and behaviour of lobsters is used as a natural example to the formation of social hierarchies. The other parts of the work explore and criticize the state of young men, the upbringing which ignores sex differences between boys and girls, male-female interpersonal relationships, school shootings, religion and moral nihilism, relativism and lack of respect to the values that build Western society. In the last chapter, Peterson outlines ways one can cope with the most tragic events in a person's life, events that are often out of

Rules for Life

Bruce Spittle

REMEMBER THIRD THURSDAY

Thursday, 20th SEPTEMBER

St John's Church Hall,
Cnr Wright Street
& Highgate

Tea and Coffee

will be available from 5.30pm

The programme will start at
6.00pm

Contribution - \$5

that individual's control. In it, he describes his own personal struggle when it was discovered that his daughter, Mikhaila, had a rare bone disease. The chapter is a meditation on how to cherish life's small redeemable qualities (i.e., to "pet a cat when you encounter one"). It also outlines a practical way to deal with hardship to focus on the next minute rather than the next three months).

Outline of the book:

1. Stand up straight with your shoulders back
2. Treat yourself like someone you are responsible for helping
3. Make friends with people who want the best for you
4. Compare yourself to who you were yesterday, not to who someone else is today
5. Do not let your children do anything that makes you dislike them
6. Set your house in perfect order before you criticize the world
7. Pursue what is meaningful (not what is expedient)
8. Tell the truth – or, at least, don't lie
9. Assume that the person you are listening to might know something you don't
10. Be precise in your speech
11. Do not bother children when they are skateboarding
12. Pet a cat when you encounter one on the street

Peterson takes the stance that life is a struggle and sooner or later obstacles will come in the way of everyone. One needs to prepare for this by getting one's life in order as the obstacles may otherwise be overwhelming and lead to chaos. In the book he frequently quotes passages from the Bible and treats these with reverence because he feels they contain great wisdom. He often refers to heaven and hell. He has not stated clearly whether or not he believes in a theistic God but has said that he acts as if there were such a God. As an example of his writing, from pages 224–225, he states:

If you pay attention, when you are seeking something, you will move towards that goal. More importantly, however, you will acquire the information that allows your goal to transform. A totalitarian never asks, "What if my current ambition is in error?" He treats it, instead, as the Absolute. It becomes his God, for all intents and

purposes. It constitutes his highest value. It regulates his emotions and motivational states, and determines his thoughts. All people serve their ambition. In that matter, there are no atheists. There are only people who know, or don't know, what God they serve."

This passage illustrates how the term God can have different meanings. For some, being an atheist means not believing in a theistic God while Peterson suggests God is a term that refers to a person's highest values, and since everyone has values, of which some may be higher than others, everyone has a God and thus there are no atheists.

Jordan Peterson's approach to life involves the core concept that life is a struggle in which adversity will be encountered and to be able to cope with it (reach a heavenly state) we need to be prepared by developing a disciplined life with insight and character. Without these we risk going into a state of chaos (hell). He sees the mythical material in the Bible as encompassing great truths that can be learned from.

"Something we cannot see protects us from something we do not understand. The thing we cannot see is culture, in its intrapsychic or internal manifestation. The thing we do not understand is the chaos that gave rise to culture. If the structure of culture is disrupted, unwittingly, chaos returns. We will do anything – anything – to defend ourselves against that return."

As preparation for the meeting you might consider watching a presentation by Peterson on YouTube

Questions for discussion:

1. What do you think of Peterson's view of life and his religious approach to it including his understanding of the Bible?
2. What do you think of his concept that there are no atheists?
3. What comments do you have on his 12 rules for life?

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