

An Unexpected Lesson from Einstein

I have always been fascinated by physicist Albert Einstein. His intellect is certainly amazing, but I also admire his search for answers about the meaning of life. Though he is probably best known for his theory of relativity, Einstein's numerous scientific contributions were ultimately acknowledged when *Time Magazine* recognized him in 1999 as the Person of the Century.

My favorite story about Einstein happened after he became a household name. The great physicist was traveling by train. When the conductor came to Einstein he requested his ticket. The famous genius reached into his vest pocket but did not find the ticket there. He searched through all of his other pockets, then looked in his briefcase, however, the missing ticket was nowhere to be found.

However, by this time the conductor recognized his famous passenger and said, "Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it." With that, he continued down the aisle punching other passengers' tickets. Before moving to the next railroad car, he turned around for one more look at his famous guest and saw the physicist on his hands and knees looking underneath his seat for the missing ticket.

He retraced his steps and again reassured him, "Dr. Einstein, don't worry, I know who you are... You don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one." Einstein reportedly said, "Young man, I too know who I am. What I don't know is where I am going."

I love this story because it reminds me that bright people can be distracted and forget simple things. None of us is as accomplished as Einstein, but all of us like him sometimes fail to remember simple things. In my mind, the real point of the story is the importance of knowing who you are and where you are going.

Finding answers to both questions is connected to a reality the Bible repeatedly reminds us of; that life is short. David wrote, "All we are is a puff of air; we're like shadows in a campfire." (Psalm 144:4, MSG) James 4:14 says, "Your life is like the morning fog— it's here a little while, then it's gone." (NLT) Both verses communicate the reality that our earthly lives do not last long.

To know who we are and where we are going, we need to understand life is short. It is only as we grasp the significance of eternal life that we can understand how to live well. Moses put it this way, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." (Psalm 90:12, NIV) It is only as we realize how brief life is that we are equipped to live wisely.