



Unity Church of Christianity
Giving Life Meaning
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Howard Caesar

At some point everyone is searching for meaning to their lives. That's the best way you can put it. Everyone is looking for the answers to what it is that gives them a deeper sense of meaning. What is it that brings on a deeper sense of meaning for an individual? Quite often, our main focus in life is defining our own wants and needs and then working toward manifesting and realizing those in our lives. The need can be something as broad as wanting to be happy or wanting to travel or wanting to prosper. Or it may be something as simple as wanting a decent form of transportation.

This dimension of looking for the meaning of life or deepening the meaning of your life is interesting. There was some material that came into my hands which was developed by David B. Wolf. He developed something called developmental relationship marketing, also known as ageless marketing. It places greater focus on one's stage of life than age of life. Usually people market to an age versus a stage of life.

If you look at it from the psychological stages, there are actually seasons to one's life. I found it interesting. Wolf says each person's life is a story—that's nothing new—and that each season of life has a signature set of objectives. These objectives play a role in determining what our needs are. One season is spring, which is the first season of your life and represents the first two

decades of your life—age zero to 20. The main developmental objective of spring is to acquire the basic intellectual, emotional, and social skills needed to enter into and navigate through adulthood with some degree of success. Summer is the second two decades of life—ages 20 to 40. The main developmental objective of summer is to complete the development of the social self, which includes integration into social networks and stepping into roles that serve one's vocational, social, and personal aspirations. Fall is the third two decades of life—ages 40 to 60. The main developmental objective there is advancing the inner-self to a higher quality of self-expression, which is integration with the social self, so as to create a more resilient and balanced personality. Winter is the remaining years of life—age 60 to the end of life. The main developmental objective there is reaching a transcendent state that infuses one with an inner quietness or stillness beyond all of the outer activity. It deepens the sense of satisfaction that makes the burdens of growing old easier to bear.

Wolf says that the search for meaning is the primary life strategy in the fall—from 40 to 60. It's there in other seasons as well. We may be looking for the meaning of life at other times, but that is the primary time. It can vary for people. It can come up in someone's teen years, but for most people the primary time is in the fall. He says that play is the primary life strategy in the spring. Play is critical to learning. The young explore their roles, ideas, beliefs, and situations without an innate fear of making a mistake. The primary life strategy in summer is work, where the person is striving to become someone—socially and vocationally. The search for meaning is the primary life strategy in the fall. The focus there changes from becoming someone to being someone, which is a big difference. The inner-self long submerged by an outer-world-directed agenda yearns for a simpler life. The quest for life satisfaction focuses less on things and more on experience. Last is the primary strategy for winter, which is the struggle for reconciliation. This is a time for reconciling life's positive and negative experiences and for making peace with one's self, others, and the world at large.

Although this man's study in the search for meaning says it takes place primarily in the fall, I'd like for all of you to move into the place that goes beyond any limitation with age and allow yourself to be in the here and now, searching for a deeper meaning. So we're all in the fall right now, regardless of our ages.

Jesus addressed the idea of a deeper meaning for life simply and profoundly. Sometimes people pass over it because it is so simple and basic. He spoke about meaning and a sense of fulfillment when He said, "Love one another and do unto others what you would wish them to do unto you." All that is religion and moral is contained in those two precepts. Basically, if they were observed by all of the world, everyone would be happy. There wouldn't be hate, war, or poverty because everyone would be coming from that space of love and oneness. They would be doing unto others as they would have being done unto themselves. But, not everyone lives that precept. You can look around the world and see that. If any one of you here today wants your life to have a deeper sense of meaning and fulfillment, you have to choose to live and learn those two precepts more than you ever have before.

The word “do” is found in that Golden Rule—“do unto others.” You have to do something. At Unity we teach that we’re all one and are all brothers and sisters in this spiritual family. We are one family under God and are all children of God. We are called, then, to do something in this world to make it a better place, make a difference, contribute, and help. That’s what we’re called to do. Within the frameworks of our lives, we’re called to look for where we are given this opportunity. All you have to do is ask the Divine and there will be all kinds of opportunities that will emerge where you can help, assist, and serve, bringing more meaning to your own life.

It is said that the soul cannot elevate itself to the higher spiritual realms except by devotion to one’s fellow creatures. There has to be some sense of devotion that moves out beyond your personal self.

Did you know that the word “charity” was used Biblically with “love?” They’re one in the same and used interchangeably. In the Bible it says, “Faith, hope, love—these three; but the greatest of these is love.” There are also translations that say, “Faith, hope, charity—these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” Some people think, though, that charity only means giving money. Charity means giving goodness of all kinds—time, money, talent, kindness, help.

Jesus made it clear that the two greatest obstacles for humanity to overcome were selfishness and pride. His teaching focuses on the great need to learn charity in the broad sense, along with humility. Those two virtues are important. Selfishness and pride are contrary to that. One is to exercise charity and humility in order to combat selfishness and pride. In all of His teachings, Jesus indicated that these two virtues lead to eternal happiness and take you to the meaning of life. Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” meaning those who are humble. “For those are in the kingdom of heaven,” He concluded. In the beginning of His sermon on the mound He said, “Blessed are those who are pure in heart. Blessed are the peace-makers. Blessed are the merciful.” There are thousands of ways to practice charity. We can do this through our thoughts, words, deeds, actions, and prayers.

Many people deplore the fact that they’re unable to do all of the good they would like to do in the world due to lack of funds. I have had lots of people tell me that if they become rich and win the lottery, they will pay off all our debts and mortgages. That’s great and I love the intention, but we are not to remain inactive in doing good because we don’t have sufficient funds. It’s important to realize that. There are thousands of ways in which an individual can respond in this life with charity. If we look for them, they will appear. There is no one in this world who cannot help someone, regardless of their state, condition, or circumstance—offer some consolation or minimize another’s suffering in some way. While money may be lacking, we can all give our time and talents to help others in so many ways.

Jesus gave us some good guidelines for this, since this is what our lives are to be about. This is a measure of the impact your life has. He said,

Take care not to do good deeds before men to be seen of them, otherwise you’ll have no reward from your Father, which is in heaven. Therefore, when you give to the needy, do

not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites in the synagogues do in the streets so they may receive the glory from men. Truly, when you do your good deeds then, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving can be given in secret. And then your Fathers who sees in secret may reward you openly.

It has been said that those who are seeking human approval are putting faith in humanity more than God and that they value present life more than a future life. In other words, there's the suggestion that there is a world beyond in which there is a reward for the good you accomplish, even in this life. It's a subtle thing we go through, in terms of when we do good for people. There's a part of us that wants to be acknowledged. It's just in human nature. Jesus is saying, "Get over it. Just do the good and let it go. Do it in secret; it has a greater reward. You are connecting to the Divine as the channel that made you a vessel through which that good was moving and making a difference in this world." It has also been taught that those who seek glorification on earth with the good deeds that they have done have already paid themselves, so God owes them nothing more. Pride has won over humility.

Speaking of humility, Jesus talked about the wonderful story in Mark, the earliest Gospel written. It's the story in which Jesus sat at the temple near where they were bringing offerings. He watched how the people were bringing their various money to the temple treasury. Many of them were rich and put large amounts in. Then came a certain poor widow who threw in two tiny coins that made a farthing. When Jesus saw that, He called his disciples over. It was that important. He said, "To tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all of the others." He was making a distinction of the heart. He said, "They gave from the surplus of their wealth, whereas she gave that which even she herself dearly needed. Everything she had to live on, she gave." The point Jesus was making was that many people tend to care for themselves first—and we certainly may need to do that. The true charity thinks of others first.

Jesus had more advice along this line. He said that even if you're having a dinner at your house do not invite only your friends and brothers and sisters and relations and your rich neighbors; invite the poor, the lame, the maimed, and the blind. Then you will be blessed because they can't pay you back in any way. That really takes you out of the box in terms of understanding what charity really is.

Jesus was saying that the act of benevolence in this world is really what gives you happiness and a sense of meaning with your life. If we could only have this consistent intention for taking happiness to families and individuals—looking for ways to brighten others' days—it becomes a delight of the heart and takes you to another place. It makes you feel like you are really contributing. Charity is a word that synthesizes all of the virtues and can give a person a foretaste of the joys to be experienced later in the realms beyond this world.

By being on earth, we have to understand that we have certain obligations to our brothers and sisters in the spiritual family of humanity. The opportunities are there all around us, and we have to begin to awaken to them. That's a part of why we're here and helps us grasp that we are all

one. We are to do to others as we would have them do unto us because we have had others do unto us in ways that have blessed us.

In Matthew 25 Jesus talked about rewards that are waiting for those who have understood what oneness is about and have come from a broad, open heart with a sense of charity and goodness. Jesus said,

Then the king will say to those on his right (meaning the righteous), ‘Come you who are blessed by my Father. Take your inheritance that was prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For, here’s how you will receive that inheritance. I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me.

The righteous said, “When did we ever do that?” His answer was, “Whenever you did this for one of the least of my brothers, you did it for me. That was me.” That’s the understanding of oneness. Remember any help you do to any of your brothers and sisters in this world leads to an eternal deepened feeling of completeness. The acts of charity are really a foretaste of joys to be possessed later.

A lawyer asked Jesus what he could do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked him what the law said. The man said, “To love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.” Jesus said, “That’s right, so go do that. Oh yes, also love your neighbor as thyself.” When the lawyer asked who is neighbor was, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan, in which a levite and a priest walked by a guy who had been beat up and left for dead on the side of the road. One person who happened to be a Good Samaritan picked him up, cleaned his wounds, took him into town, checked him into an inn, got him further help, and paid the bill. Jesus asked the lawyer, “Of those three, who do you think is the neighbor?” The lawyer said, “The one who had mercy on him, of course.” Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.” That story is there to remind us that we’re inconvenienced all of the time and can always rationalize a reason to walk away, but that’s not what your life is for if you want to have meaning and depth.

There is a voice of charity that speaks inside of all of us. It says,

I do not tell you what you must do; I leave this initiative to your kindly hearts. If I were to tell you how to proceed, you would gain no credit for your good deeds. I say only that I am charity, and I extend my hands toward you through those of your suffering brothers and sisters. But if I ask, I also give—and give generously. I am inviting you to a great banquet wherein I will furnish a tree upon which all will be satisfied. See how beautiful it is—full of the flowers and fruits. Go gather all of the fruits of this magnificent tree that is called beneficence. Then, in place of the foliage and fruit you have taken aware, I will fasten to it all of the good deeds that you have practiced. Then I will take this tree to God and He will load it again with as much beneficence as is inexhaustible. Accompany me then, my friends, so that I may count you amongst those who follow my banner. Do not fear, for I will conduct along the pathway to salvation, for I am charity.

Our good deeds ripple out into the universe and we can't measure all of the good that they may accomplish in the grand scheme of things—the good seeds that are planted. It has been said that you can count the seeds in an apple but you cannot count the apples in a seed. Think of Mother Theresa and all of the seeds of good that she distributed in her life. She had such an open, giving, helping, and serving heart that made a difference everywhere. It is said that upon leaving this earth and moving into the next realm beyond the veil, when you arrive you are greeted by all of those souls who you have helped—those you have served and helped gain happiness and made a difference for. They all benefited from your charity. Think of the masses of souls that greeted Mother Theresa in the world beyond, if what they say is true.

Today is Volunteer Appreciation Sunday. There are people here who make the time to serve. It may be an inconvenience for them, but they make time and make a point to do so. They give back and want to help. I am grateful to them and hopefully all of you are too. I truly believe that on some level, that deepens their sense of meaning in life. They go through the extra effort in their busy lives to serve and help you in the effort that you may grow spiritually deeper and your needs might be met in the time you're here and that it's a good experience for you.

The apostle Paul stated, "When I have learned the language of the angels and when I have received the gift of prophecy and when I can penetrate and understand all of the vast mysteries and when I have all of the faith that is possible so that I can even say to that mountain, 'Be transported to yonder place,' I will have all of these things, but I will not have charity. I am nothing." Paul got what Jesus was saying.

Jesus said, "Faith, hope, charity—these three; but the greatest—the superior to all of these—is charity—love." Making a difference was Jesus' profoundly important teaching that leads to greater and deeper meaning in life. May we all answer the call.

God bless you.