

Finding Real Meaning

Romans 12:1-2

Preface

Recently I was talking with someone who said something very candidly to me. He said, “Sometimes I feel like God is on my side and helping me out and sometimes I feel like he is not.” I appreciated this man’s honesty. Frankly we have all felt that way.

What causes us to feel like God is not on our side? What causes us to feel like God is working against us rather than for us?

The answer rests in our expectations.

We have our own expectations of what we want out of life. We have our own vision of what will be meaningful to us. All we really expect from God is to help us get where we want to go.

Today, we will discuss the keys to finding real meaning in life.

Scripture – Read

¹² Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual^a act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-3 NIV

Introduction

What was your dream? Did you dream of being a professional golfer; perhaps an astronaut or a scientist?

All of us have things we dreamed of doing that did not come to fruition. In fact most of us reach a point in life when we must come to grips with who we are and where our station is in life. We call that “mid-life crisis.”

There is good news. Life can be full of meaning and joy even if you have not achieved your dream job career. In fact, your dream career alone would not bring you real meaning.

Illus: In the movie “City Slickers” Jack Palace plays an old gruff cowboy who is short on words and quite ruff around the edges. Billy Crystal plays a city slicker who goes on a cattle drive with some friends for an exciting and challenging vacation. Billy Crystal and his buddies are deep in the trenches of mid-life crisis.

At one point Curly (Jack Palace) says to the city slickers, “I’ll tell you the secret to life. This one thing, just this one thing.” With their curiosity peaked, the men are eager to know what the one thing is. Curly replies, “That’s what you’ve got to figure out.”

Everyone wants to know that one thing that is the key to finding real meaning and happiness in life. There is no one thing.

You may say, “Wait a minute the one thing is to accept Christ as your savior.” That one thing will not bring complete meaning and fulfillment to your life.

Real meaning in life requires knowing Christ as your savior for sure. But it also involves following Christ with your life. It involves three important steps:

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1. Finding Real Meaning Involves Surrender

In verse 1 Paul urges us to surrender. In view of God’s mercy (often translated God’s compassion) we are to present (offer) our bodies a living sacrifice.

There are some extremely important lessons in this verse. The verb translated offer or present also means “yield”. We must yield or offer ourselves to Christ.

The word “bodies” is used in light of the Old Testament sacrifice and represents the totality of one’s life. This means we are to surrender our entire selves to Him. We must surrender our entire being to God.

Also notice that we are to be living sacrifices. God doesn’t call us to be partial sacrifices and he doesn’t call us to be death bed sacrifices. He calls us to give our entire selves to him now!

Too often we never fully surrender to God. We never offer our entire being, our attitudes, our interests, our wants and desires over to God. There is usually a hold-out. We don’t even give God the bulk and hold out the crumbs. We usually give God the crumbs and keep the bulk for ourselves. God wants all of you.

Illus: I am not much of a stock market guy. Pam and I have some stock but I could never invest a huge amount of money in the stock market because of my first stock experience. As a young man, I invested our savings in some stock of a well known company that had just gone public. The stock quickly soared and I was thrilled. Soon it began to fall just as quickly. I instructed

the broker (before the days of online trading) to sell if it fell below a certain value. It did and he did not. Within a 3 month period I had invested our savings and lost our savings thanks to the stock market. So for me, the stock market is always a big gamble and something to which I will never commit or surrender much.

The point is that many Christians have the same approach to surrendering to God. We are never willing to fully surrender even though that is what God requires. We try a little something now and then but if we don't get the expected gratification we give up.

God's word calls us to completely surrender all of us to Him. We are to be living sacrifices.

The simplest way to determine if you have surrendered to God is to look at your tithe. Are you giving a tithe to the work of God? Are you giving 10% of your income to further the kingdom of God? For most of our congregation the answer is "No."

How we give is a direct reflection of where we are spiritually. You might say, "You don't understand, I just can't afford it." I do understand you don't think you can't afford it. I understand that God calls us to be obedient. I understand that God can afford it and will provide if we will just be faithful, trust Him and surrender to Him. Usually we aren't willing to yield our entire self to Him, starting with our money.

What about other areas of yielding to God. Are you serving Christ? Do you volunteer to serve Him in the church? Do you use your talents for Him or do you hold back; unwilling to put them on the altar for His service? Do you attend Bible study?

The irony for many Christians is that we are happy to lay our sins and problems at the foot of the cross. We will bring all of our bad and turn it over to God. But we aren't willing to lay the rest of us at the cross. We must learn to bring the good in us and give it to God as well as the bad.

If you want to experience real meaning in life, if you want to know true fulfillment you must be willing to surrender as a living sacrifice to God.

2. Finding Real Meaning Involves Transformation

When we surrender; when we yield ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, a transformation begins to take place.

The result of surrender is that we become less conforming to the world and begin transforming to what God has planned for us.

The Greek word translated "world" in verse 2 is used in 1 Peter 1:14 and translated "pattern of the world." It literally means Age (aioni). In other words, we become less caught up in the trends of the present age and transformed to a higher calling and purpose.

The Greek word translated "transformed" is a passive imperative verb which means it keeps on happening. We keep on being transformed (metamorphousthe) which is where we get the word metamorphosis.

We are to surrender ourselves as living sacrifices to God and allow Him to conduct a metamorphosis in us. God wants to totally change you from the inside out.

Many people in our churches today have accepted Christ but have never been transformed and will not be transformed until they present themselves as a living sacrifice to God.

Notice in verse 2 that this involves the renewing of the mind. When we yield to the father, we begin to experience a complete changing of the mindset from the inside out.

As an example, I mentioned earlier about tithing. Many of you were relieved when I moved on and got off that subject. No doubt some of you thought to yourself, "Here we go again, the preacher is preaching about giving. He is just out to get more money.

For those of you who have given nothing or who just given God a few crumbs now and then, I want you to know about something remarkable. This may be incomprehensible to some of you.

There are people in this church and throughout this land that would not even think of failing to give the very first 10% of their income to the Lord. Giving their tithe is just as important to them and their worship as prayer and singing praises to God. I am not speaking of wealthy people. There are people out there who are constantly on the lookout for God to move them to give a little more over and above their tithe.

How do people become so committed to giving in this manner? Because somewhere along the way they began to sacrifice and God began a transformation.

God is business of changing lives and He wants to change your life. God wants to touch lives that are hurting and messy and transform them to a new direction and meaning. But it requires surrender on your part. God can transform your life into one of fulfillment and meaning.

3. Finding Real Meaning Involves Discovery

After urging us to surrender and be transformed, Paul says we will then discover the good, pleasing and perfect will of God.

We spend most of our lives trying to forge out our own will for ourselves. We work at it daily trying to find meaning in our labor. It isn't until we surrender and God begins a transformation that we begin to discover that God's will is actually what is good for us and brings real meaning.

Finding real meaning in life involves discovery because it is no longer trying to push our will on God. Instead we yield ourselves and begin to discover the rewards of God's will for us.

Everyday can be a day of discovering God working in your life. God can open doors you never imagined possible. God can lead you to do things you never even dreamed.

Illus: Lyle and Rose Rainey now missionaries to Belize.

When we yield ourselves to God, he gives us a desire to reach people for Christ. You reach a point where you discover that you exist as a Christian and as a church to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

It doesn't matter if you sell shoes, farm, work in construction or practice healthcare, God's will holds many exciting discoveries for you if you will surrender and be transformed to His service.

Oh how we need our congregation to understand these principles. If our congregation could get their arms around this we would exceed our budget every month. We would never again have to plead for nursery workers, teachers and volunteers.

When we begin to be transformed to who God wants us to be we start looking for ways to serve and opportunities to discover and see God working in our lives.

2 Chronicles 16:9 says, *"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him."* NKJV

Is your heart loyal to God? Are you willing to surrender and allow God to show himself strong through you?

Conclusion

Today, churches are filled with people who are just present for their own benefit. They turn to the church and their attitude is "Make me feel good."

Welcome me, pray for me, entertain me, counsel me, counsel my spouse, fix my kids and make us feel better about ourselves. And if you don't do all of this to our satisfaction, we will move on to the church down the road.

The Bible knows nothing of this. Paul doesn't say, "I am Paul and I have needs to be met." Paul says, I am Paul the servant of Jesus Christ.

Surrender your all to Christ and you will find the fulfillment you seek. Start serving Christ and you will experience the changes you seek in your life and in your family.

Self satisfaction is never found in self gratification.

Illus: I want to try and give you an illustration of this concept of surrender, transformation and discovery of just how good and perfect God's will is.

We have all thought to ourselves and perhaps even voiced the idea that when we get to heaven we are going to ask God some questions. We plan on questioning God about why he let certain things happen and how he could take someone dear from us or allow such tragedy. We have questions and we want answers.

I do not believe any of us will ask any of those questions. When we get to heaven and behold with our own eyes God's plan and what He has prepared for us, we will no longer need to ask a single question.

When we meet our loved ones who have gone on before us and we see their joy and how wonderful of a place God has given them, we will not even think of asking "Why God?"

That's how good and perfect God's plan is for each one of us.

Why not yield your entire self to Him as a living sacrifice now?, Why not allow Him to begin a transformation in you from the inside out and discover His perfect will here on earth?