

Purpose

Brown Community Group November 10, 2019

Review

We are seeing more and more in the media, ads, movies, etc. about "Making a Difference." It is no longer enough to produce a good product or provide good service, you must show how that product or service benefits society, no matter how thin that link is. Why is that? As William Lane Craig demonstrated in his book on apologetics, if God does not exist, life is absurd. If God does not exist, life has no meaning, value or purpose.

I went out walking through the streets paved with gold
Lifted some stones
Saw the skin and bones
Of a city without a soul
I stopped outside a church house
Where the citizens like to sit
They say they want the kingdom
But they don't want God in it

The Wanderer
112 sung by Johnny Cash

But people DO have meaning and purpose in their lives. If God does not exist, any meaning, value or purpose someone has is only a human illusion. Your choice: human illusion or life is absurd. Or, as Bill Johnson said: "Without God, you can be happy or consistent, but not both."

Furthermore, what if my meaning/value/purpose conflicts with yours? Since there is no law, we are left to the court of public opinion. Which changes. It is best to err on the side of opinion that most people hold lest right and wrong changes. Is this getting more absurd?

The Christian Purpose

Matthew 22:34-40 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

³⁷ Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

What is our Purpose

Our purpose, or purposes, meaning and values are found throughout the Bible, both in the old and new testaments. Rick Warren, in his best-selling book The Purpose Driven Life, does a great job of organizing them in to 5 consecutive purposes:

1. You Were Planned for God's Pleasure

Psalms 149:4 The Lord takes pleasure in his people.

2. You Were Formed for God's Family

Hebrews 2:10 God is the One who made all things, and all things are for his glory. He wanted to have many children share his glory.

3. You Were Created to Become Like Christ

2 Corinthians 3:18 So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

4. You Were Shaped for Serving God

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

5. You Were Made for a Mission

Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.

Why Now? Is this New? What has Changed?

1. Alternate purposes

Not too many years ago, a man had three things he would die for:

- His God
- His Family
- His Country

A man who was, for example, a pacifist and would not die for his country generally had the other two to fall back on. In fact, his belief in pacifism was generally related to his belief in God or the need to be there for his family. Today, we have seen the rise of people who do not believe in God or have a religion, the decline of the family and the death of nationalism. There is no foundation left to fall back on.

2. The Decline of Character and the Rise of Personality

Dr. Warren Susman, a cultural historian and author of Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the 20th Century wrote of the decline of the notion of "Character." He argues that the focus has moved from character to "self" and "personality." He believes much of this comes from the move to a more crowded society and the need to stand out (make a difference?). He believes this need has led from the cultivation of virtue but defining and expressing themselves through hobbies, dress and material possessions. Character has been thought of as a foundation or something you build or grow. It is exemplified by books such as The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin or the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament. Books on personality are more self-help and tricks to stand out while still fitting in like How to Win Friends and Influence People. While there is nothing wrong with a self-help book, without the foundation of character it is just a way to achieve what the Bible warns us not to have – pride.

"To be somebody one must be oneself (whatever that means). It is an almost too perfect irony that most of the works published and sold in large numbers as self-help in developing an effective personality insist that individuals should be "themselves" and not follow the advice or direction of others. The importance of being different, special, unusual, of standing out in a crowd—all of this is emphasized at the same time that specific directions are provided for achieving just those ends. In virtually the same breath, the reader is also urged repeatedly to "express your individuality" and to "eliminate the little personal whims, habit, traits that make people dislike you. Try in every way to have a ready command of the niceties, the manners, the ways of speech, etc. which make people think 'he's a mighty likable fellow.' That is the beginning of a reputation for personality." "

"It is significant in this context to call attention to the other key words most often associated with the concept of character. A review of over two hundred such items (books, etc.) reveals the words most frequently related to the notion of character: citizenship, duty, democracy, work, building, golden deeds, outdoor life, conquest, honor, reputation, morals, manners, integrity, and above all, manhood. The stress was clearly moral and the interest was almost always in some sort of higher moral law. The adjectives most frequently associated with personality suggest a very different concept from that of character: fascinating, stunning, attractive, magnetic, glowing, masterful, creative, dominant, forceful. These words would seldom if ever be used to modify the word character. One writer makes the point: character, he insists, is either good or bad; personality, famous or infamous."

"By 1800 the concept of character had come to define that felt to be essential for the maintenance of the social order. The term itself came to mean a group of traits believed to have social significance and moral quality. In the age of self-consciousness, a popular vision of the self, defined by the word "character," became fundamental in sustaining and even in shaping the significant forms of the culture. Such a concept filled two important functions. It proposed a method for both mastery and development of the self. In fact, it argued that its kind of self-control was the way to fullest development of the moral significance of self. But it also provided a method of presenting the self to society, offering a standard of conduct that assured interrelationship between the "social" and the "moral." "

Conclusion

As Christians, we have meaning, value and purpose. We have role models, examples and teachers. We have a solid foundation as well as one we can build on. We do not have a need for "personality" because we have a God and savior who recognize us for what we are whoever we are. And we can always improve. As Christians we must be careful to never follow the trends of "personality" but stay with true doctrine, no matter how it is perceived by society. And, yes, we can call it "true."

Ephesians 4:14-16 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.