

## THE MEANING OF LIFE

2014

*'What is life about?' 'Why am I here for?' 'What is my purpose in life?'* These are possible questions some of us may have asked ourselves at some point in our lives, but I can honestly say that I'm not one of them. However, as I define the goals for my life and the choices I make, don't I indirectly answer them?.. So, it's with this philosophical question lingering on my mind this morning that I went out for a walk.

As I turned onto a street in the retirement community, I spotted the red scarf and its owner sitting on a bench overlooking the lake, his right arm resting on top of the bench's back. He seemed wrapped in thought and I warned him of my presence a few feet away. At the sound of my voice, he glanced over his shoulder and greeted me.

"Hi, young lady! Nice to see you again! Would you care to join me?" he asked, showing me with a sign of hand the empty seat to his right.

"I'd be glad to!" I answered.

"Beautiful view from up here, isn't it?" I commented as I sat down.

"Yes, especially now that the water is coming back up in our lakebed," he replied, seemingly encouraged by the latest news we heard from the Save our Lakes Organization.

"Yeah...well, I don't want to rain on your parade, but I'll believe it when I see it." I commented, sounding defeated. "How many times have we heard the same news? And how many times have we seen the water come up a bit, and then go back down again? Teased...we're just being teased...every time..."

He frowned at me. "Where's your faith, dear lady?"

"Don't even go there!" I replied with a wry smile. "But I have a question for you," I kept on, hoping to change the subject. "I opened my Bible this morning in the book of Ecclesiastes and started reading a couple of chapters. The Teacher - probably King Solomon - repeatedly says throughout the verses I've read so far that after he surveyed all that his hands had done and what he had toiled to achieve - his list probably being very impressive! -, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.'<sup>1</sup> I know I haven't read the book entirely, but so far it doesn't seem too uplifting. I can't believe that what we do in our lifetime doesn't amount to anything...that whatever we do in this life is meaningless?..." I sighed.

"Well, dear lady, the author is simply trying to convey his own reflection on life in general. The emptiness, the futility and absurdity of it all... I realize his writings may be a bit gloomy but I believe the issues with which he deals and the questions he raises are mostly aimed at those who would claim any absolute values in this life, including possessions, fame, success, or pleasure. If you think about it, all of our accomplishments, the status, prestige, power or position we may hold in this world will ultimately be canceled out by death. That's a reality no one can escape from... However, in the end he concludes that we should rejoice in whatever gifts God may give. We may find the author blunt and gloomy in his assessment of our human condition, but I think he's making his point across quite effectively, don't you think?..."

"Maybe so..." I said, not totally convinced.

“Have you ever closely watched one of these little creatures?” he asked, pointing at a squirrel digging a hole in the ground in front of us. “If you did, you surely noticed that its life consists primarily in its search for food that he oftentimes hides in the ground for future use, I can only imagine. And did you know how fast they multiply? It’s amazing!.. A mother can have two to eight offspring and several litters in a year. They can be a blessing for some people but become a nuisance for others!.. They’re led by their instinct, and survival is their only goal. When their time on this earth is over, that’s the end of it. They’ll return to dust. They’re forgotten, never to be remembered... Other squirrels will then most probably enjoy the fruit of their labor, the food they so carefully hid in the ground their entire lives,” he explained, making his point across.

“I understand that we will all pass away one day, but we still have to live in the meantime... So, where do we get the motivation to go on with our lives when we already know how it’ll end and that we won’t bring anything with us?.. It’s pretty depressive, don’t you think?” I asked, a bit puzzled.

“Solomon certainly makes us think about life and its significance, doesn’t he? And you haven’t finished reading his book yet!..” he said with a smile. “I read recently that suicide was the tenth leading cause of death for all ages. Unbelievable... All those people were unable to cope with their lives as they knew it and with no hope in sight, they preferred taking their own lives... So sad, isn’t it?”

“But to answer your question, there’s no simple solution. I would say, however, that if we could only grasp the fact that we are born for a higher purpose, our outlook on life would be different. Jesus is the perfect example of what I mean here. He was put on this earth to accomplish an incredible mission, and I’m sure you would agree that what he did was certainly far from being meaningless. We’re all here to make a difference in this world using the gifts God gave us, and it is for us to find what our mission or calling is. It can change throughout our lifetime but when we do find it, we can fully enjoy life as God intended it to be.”

“I recognize that Jesus went far beyond the normal call of duty, and I can’t tell you how grateful I am for what he has done...” I commented. “I, myself, was never in a position to die for anyone, and I’m sure my life isn’t as impacting as his was, but hopefully what I did and do isn’t *all* meaningless,” I sighed.

“Did you know I’ve always wanted to be a mother?” I asked him out of the blue.

“To tell you the truth, it doesn’t surprise me at all!”

“Yep!... As far as I can remember it has been the desire of my heart... The fact that my mother passed away when I was three had probably something to do with it. Who knows?.. After her death, we were blessed to have one of my aunts moved in with our family. She was a very devoted person but I missed having someone in my life I could call ‘mom’ like all my friends did... Obviously, I had to wait for the right man before I could become a mother myself!.. So, in the meantime, I followed different paths and pursued different interests... Traveling was my passion, working at becoming the best office assistant was my career goal, and enjoying life with my friends was my favorite past time. Nothing bad as such but I admit, very self-centered. But then, I found Mr. Right, and my wish of starting a family finally came through.” I said, smiling.

“Must be a very special man this Mr. Right!..” he interjected.

“I must say that he is!... To make a long story short, we got married, three years down the road

we had our first child, and I was the happiest woman on the block!.. Two years later, we were blessed with a second child, but then something I wasn't expecting happened... I got caught up in a whirlwind of routine, chores and responsibilities, which left me emotionally and physically drained. I felt restless and my attendance back then at our neighborhood Catholic Church could not fill the void... So, I flirted with eastern forms of discipline including Transcendental Meditation and Yoga. They offered only a temporarily relief, and I finally abandoned them altogether... An unexplainable and constant restlessness consumed me, and nothing or no one could take it away... But I know God was faithfully watching over me because before the birth of our third child, he finally touched my heart in a very special way... And from thereon, motherhood became my special mission in life. I was raising the next generation of men who would eventually make a difference in other people's lives... I was totally dedicated to this mission, and found great peace and joy in accomplishing it despite the many challenges I had to face. It was a very special time in my life..."

"Well, dear lady, in acknowledging God in your life, you totally gave of yourself for your family and found great fulfillment in doing so. I'm positive that none of your efforts were meaningless. Only God can bring richness and purpose to life in whatever we do. But many things in life are truly meaningless; they just don't make any sense or bring satisfaction. The more we crave for them, the more restless we feel. And vice versa. It's a vicious circle," he sighed. "I'm sure you've heard of Helen Keller who was blind and deaf but who accomplished so much in her lifetime despite her handicap... She said: '*Many persons have a wrong idea of what constitutes true happiness. It is not attained through self-gratification but through fidelity to a worthy purpose.*' And I would agree with her."

I reflected on everything the preacher had just said and I can say that the presence of God in my life was and still is what makes all the difference in the world. I can enjoy the pleasurable moments life brings on my path, but I realized a long time ago not to depend on them to give me lasting peace and true happiness.

"So now that I've finished raising my family and have more time on my hands, and that I'm a grandmother to four lovely 'munchkins' so far, where should I channel my energies from hereon that would be *meaningful*?" I asked without really expecting an answer from him, but he gave me one nonetheless.

"I'm sure, dear lady, God has already shown you what your mission is. So, go for it!" he replied, as he stood up and raised his right arm way up in the air like a General ordering his troop to march on!..

I laughed, and left him knowing very well that writing my little stories is in part what I'm supposed to do at this time in my life. I don't know exactly why, but if it's only to keep my sanity, well, it'll be all worthwhile!..

1 Eccl. 2:11

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