

The Right and Wrong Way of Living

by A.B. Simpson

The main object of life is to find God, discover our true self, and find our life's work to leave behind fruits that shall remain.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 1:2, Isaiah 55:2, Matthew 6:19

Topics: "Purpose in Life", "True Fulfillment"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the futility of living for superficial gains, urging listeners to seek true fulfillment in God rather than in empty pursuits. He illustrates this through stories of misdirected efforts, such as a steward who destroyed a valuable castle to build a wall around nothing, and a girl who bought a purse without money to fill it. Simpson calls for a return to God as the center of life, encouraging individuals to discover their true selves and purpose. He stresses that true happiness and fulfillment come from a relationship with God, leading to a life of meaningful work and legacy. Ultimately, he challenges the congregation to leave behind a lasting impact through their lives and actions.

Transcript

"Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto me and eat that which is good and let your soul delight itself in fatness." (Is. 55: 2.)

This passage tells us of misdirected effort and wasted strength. There is a coarse and brutal way in which multitudes are thus spending their "money for that which is not bread," and their "labor for that which satisfies not," in sensual indulgence and degrading vice. But there are also more refined and respectable ways in which multitudes are throwing away their lives and getting nothing at last but the empty shells.

One is reminded of the story told by Lord Dufferin about his Irish estate. There was a fine old castle on the land which was exposed to neglect and depredation through lack of a protecting wall. The old ruin was of great value and the noble lord desired to preserve it at a heavy cost. So before leaving for India, he gave instructions to his steward to have a fine substantial wall erected all around it. On his return from India he went to see the estate and inspect the old castle, but found to his dismay that the castle had entirely disappeared and there was just a great modern wall of solid masonry enclosing nothing but the site of the old ruin. He called the steward and asked him what he had done with the castle that he valued so highly. "Och !" said he, "that ould thing. I just pulled it down and used the materials to build the wall."

The gifted lord used often to tell the humorous story and find in it a fine illustration of the way in which so many people were destroying the real treasures of life and putting their strength and energy into that which was but a mere shell to hold something else which had been overlooked and neglected. Not unlike the thoughtlessness of the steward was the conduct of a little girl in England who got a half crown given her by a friend and immediately went and spent it to buy a purse to hold the money in. When she got home she found a purse but nothing to put in it.

So multitudes are spending life with its infinite possibilities in merely providing the outward forms of things to discover at last that the real values have been quite forgotten. How often we find higher culture and education simply providing a lot of empty shells, qualities which have no practical value either in producing happiness or power. How often we see money spent lavishly in accumulating the mere materials of life; houses, lands, equipage, income and the whole machinery of life; but when it is all accomplished, it is hollow at heart. There are houses, but they are not homes, for there is not love to hallow them. There are the means of gratification, but there is no pleasure, for selfishness has destroyed the secret of true happiness.

Saddest of all is the waste of religious effort. What is ceremony and form without real devotion and love! How empty the pageant of a splendid ritual when behind it is the skeleton of a dead church and a Christless soul! Not more cold and cheerless are the marble monuments in the cemetery and the gilded spires on the cathedral above the worshipper's head. It is all like the vision of the valley of dry bones: the forms of men, but there is no life in them.

Dear friend, are you spending your life in simply building walls with nothing to enclose; in buying purses that only hide their own emptiness; in making picture frames while the picture itself is absent, and in spending existence in one endless round of busy toil and anxious pursuit of happiness and success, to find at last, like the preacher in Ecclesiastes, that your vision has faded like a dream, that your life is but a scaffolding and the building has not yet even been begun and that there is nothing left but to sit in the chill winter of despair, and cry, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit?"

What then, is the real object of life? What is there that is worth living for and expending our strength to realize and accomplish?

I. The first object of life is to find God and to be rightly adjusted to Him. As the flower needs the sun; as the birdling needs its mother; as the infant perishes without a parent's love and care, so the human soul was made for God and never can rest until it rests in Him. The worlds of space all circle round their proper suns. There is a center of gravitation for everything and when any planet loses this bond, it becomes a wandering star and drifts into darkness and destruction.

God is our center and our sun. Faith is the great bond that holds us to our orbit and without that we are "wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." The object of the gospel is to bring man back to God; to restore the bond of confidence and bring us into our true place of trust and obedience to Him. Then we truly begin to live. Then our hearts find the source of its happiness and God pours into us that fulness of love and blessing which we were made to receive.

This must all begin by that simple trust that blots out our sin and brings us into fellowship and confidence with Him. Then the Holy Spirit reestablishes the vital bond of love and union and God fills us with His own nature and we blossom and bud and bear fruit like the vine that has found its congenial soil and reached the fountains from which it draws its vital support.

Until this comes to pass, everything in life is vain. Our efforts are misdirected; our toil is wasted; our struggles are vain. We are but marking time like the soldier who stands on a pivot while the army centers round him. We are making no progress, or to adopt the figure of the text, we are "spending our money for that which is not bread and our labor for that which satisfies not."

Oh, wandering hearts, come home to God. Accept His reconciling love. Become His children. Receive His Spirit and return to your true place of rest and satisfaction. God needs you to receive His fulness, and you need Him to fill the void which no created thing can ever fill.

II. The second thing in life is to find yourself and rise to your true ideal of character and power.

When we find God, then we also find ourselves. How many people have never yet discovered the treasure of their own existence. It is buried like a jewel in the refuse of a filthy room. How true it is, "A man's life consists not in the abundance of the things that he possesses." The prodigal sought for happiness in dissipation, but he only lost himself and the first step in his restoration was when it could be said of him, "He came to himself." How many have lost themselves like him in earthly pleasure, sensual indulgence, the greed of gain, the whirl of fashion, the wild race for earthly success! Vainly too, you seek for your true self in mere intellectual culture. You will not find a true man and woman there. The intellect is but the lamp that lights the chambers of the soul, but the guest is deeper and further than this. It is that immortal spirit that came from God, that belongs to eternity and that can only be filled with the infinite and everlasting. Sometimes men get a flash of the glory of the true nature which is hidden within them. How finely Victor Hugo used to say, "The winter of age is upon my head, but eternal springtime is in my heart. I feel within my soul the symphonies of the age to come. My work is only beginning. I feel in myself a future life. Heaven lights me with the sunshine of unseen worlds. I am rising, I know, toward the sky."

Beloved, have you found that glorious life? Have you brought it into contact with Him and have you truly begun to live in the highest sense?

John Newton tells of a night that he lay in his hammock on the Adriatic Sea after a fearful spell of wild debauchery. In a lurid dream, he saw himself throwing away his soul into the sea like a precious jewel at the daring of Satan, and as it sank beneath the waves, a fiendish shout went up from the pit and a flash of angry fire seemed to light up the mountain tops along the shore. His spirit sank within him and he felt that he had lost his soul, buried forever a treasure more precious than all the world.

Then, in his dream, his Savior seemed to stand before him and asked him if he wished to have that jewel recovered once more. He threw himself at His feet and earnestly pleaded for Him to save it if He could. Then the Redeemer leaped into the flood, battled with the waves, sank beneath the surges and at last, wearied and panting, rose and reached the deck, holding in His hand the precious gem. Eagerly the sailor reached out his hand to grasp it, but the Master held him back and said, "No, I will keep it now for you. If I gave it to you, you would but sacrifice it again and when life is done I will have it for you at the gates of heaven safe forevermore."

And from that vision that drunken sailor went forth to become the sweetest of the saints of God, to write the hallowed hymns that have been singing men and women to glory for a century, and to leave behind him the luster of a life more precious than earth's fairest gems.

Oh, men and women, each of you has such a treasure. Have you truly found it and are you letting God keep it, polish it and prepare it for the highest possibilities of earth and the richest glories of heaven?

There is nothing on earth worth half so much as men. After Christ Himself, the things we value most are human souls. We would give the world for one of them. How beautiful are they to God; as precious as the blood He shed for them, and sometime to become as glorious as He in the coming age. Each of us is such a treasure. God help us to know ourselves, to find our true value and to be God's best.

III. The third object of life is to find our work and be occupied with the best and highest things. Man was made for activity and the powers of the human mind surpass all possible conception.

The Master's great business was to finish His work. The apostle's supreme motive was "that I may finish my course with joy and the ministry which I received of the Lord Jesus to testify of the Gospel of the grace of God." Have we found our calling? Are we pouring out our life into other lives? Are we leaving behind us fruits that shall remain and work into which shall be crystalized the best that we could be and do?

Mother: Perhaps your work is to leave one child, the blossom of your being, to accomplish in years to come mightier things than you could even dream. So the holy Monica loved, suffered, waited, prayed, until her one boy, Augustine, became the blossom of her life and she passed away, leaving him to speak for her, to live for her and to live out her life on earth. So the century plant spends one hundred years preparing for one supreme effort and at last produces a single flower, gorgeous beyond description, and blossoms and dies.

Wife: Are you living out your life meekly, gently, unselfishly by love, by help, by prayer in the man to whom God has linked you as the helpmeet of his great struggle? Can there be a nobler ambition than to be the power behind the scenes, the vital force, the inspiring impulse of a life which is but the expression of your silence, your suffering and your love?

Christian Worker: Has your being been poured out in some great and noble work which God has given you and which you are leaving behind you to bless humanity when you yourself shall have passed from earthly view? Some time ago there passed through New York an old man on his way to China, who for forty years had lived but for one thing: to plant the Gospel in the unopened provinces of that vast empire, and from this faith and love had sprung the China Inland Mission, with its hundreds of missionaries and its thousands of converts. His last desire was to end his days in China and on his way across the Atlantic, a traveling companion has told how he used to talk every day with exulting joy of the delusions that had taken possession of his failing mind, namely, that all the passengers and crew upon the steamer were missionaries to China, and he would laugh aloud in his joy that so many hundreds of new missionaries were about to be added to the force in that land. The ruling passion was strong in death and with this sublime enthusiasm overbalancing his weakened mind he passed on to interior China and in its furthest province, where his glorious spirit went up to be with God. He had found his life work and he has left it as a memorial more lasting than the monuments of Egypt.

God help us to find our Savior, to find ourselves, and to find our work,

"And, departing, leave behind us

Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints which perhaps another

Traveling o'er life's solemn main,

Some forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, may take heart again."

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