

LIVING A SIGNIFICANT LIFE

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“Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, justice and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the Lord. (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

Throughout history people have built monuments to great leaders, powerful rulers and famous personalities. Some have built their own monuments, and others have had monuments erected for them by others out of respect or gratitude. The capital city of the United States is named for the famous leader of the American Revolutionary War; the massive pyramids in Egypt’s Valley of the Kings are a testimony to the might of her rulers; the famous Taj Mahal is a memorial to one man’s enduring love for his deceased wife. All these monuments or memorials are designed to remind us of someone and of what he or she accomplished on this earth.

A longing to be remembered for what one has achieved exists in every human heart. We all want to make a difference. Perhaps we want to change the world. Yet the reality is that most—if not all—of us will not lead lives that are glorious enough to make a permanent mark in the pages of human history. Judged from this perspective one might well ask, “What is the meaning of my life? If I cannot influence human history in some way, what significance *does* my life have?”

This is an important question, and our answer to it should not be made lightly. In our daily lives we tend to focus on accomplishing *measurable* tasks—setting and reaching goals and crossing things off our “to do” lists. But aren’t our lives supposed to mean more than simply being able to compress more and more accomplishments into each 24-hour period? Is there nothing beyond life’s passing events and endless routines? Isn’t there some way we can lead a significant life, a life which will *stand for* something important?

Now it is nearly impossible for us to make a sound judgement about the quality or extent of our influence on others. Often the effects of our words and actions—for good or evil—cannot really be measured or distinguished from other influences. However, whether we like it or not, *what* we do and *how* we do it does affect others. For this reason, we must be aware of what effects we want our speech and actions to have. Although we cannot control how others respond, we can choose—at least to some extent—what type of influence we will consciously exert.

Within this ability to choose lies the secret of leading a significant life. We can daily choose to influence others for *good*. We can *receive* what the Lord teaches in our minds and hearts, and, from affection, *transform* this knowledge into words and deeds. In this way we can *transmit* the Lord’s influence to others. For if the Lord is actively present in our speech and acts, then, through *our* lives, He can touch the lives of others, in turn inspiring them to look to Him.

We all admire heroic acts, brave deeds, moving words, and commanding personalities. Yet we can easily overlook the numerous small, almost routine gestures which show the depth of another’s inner character. Who has not felt inspired by the cheerful, thoughtful and helpful acts of another? Who has not stood in awe of someone who sincerely and humbly apologized for clumsy or thoughtless words? Who could live without the comforting and encouraging words of a friend, who listens to even our petty concerns with an understanding ear and speaks to us from a gentle heart?

Left to ourselves we would seek only our own glory and satisfaction. Both experience and revelation confirm this truth. Without the Lord's influx, we would glory in our supposed wisdom, in our imagined strength and gloat over worldly possessions. Yet these things in themselves can never make our lives significant in any lasting way. In fact, there is a danger that the more we seek to erect lasting *natural* monuments to ourselves the more we become distracted from *eternal* goals, which so often seem much less grand in our eyes. Focusing on our own glorification turns our minds away from the very forces which can make our lives significant in a permanent fashion.

The Lord Himself tells us what we must do if we wish to live a significant life. He is our God, and He alone can lead us to find a life with lasting purpose. The Lord wants us to have a clear purpose for our lives. He tells us, "[L]et him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, justice and righteousness in the earth." This is the first step we must take to lead a meaningful life. We must first learn to know and understand our Lord and what He expects from us. We must go to Him regularly in His Word, prayerfully allowing Him to remind us of His truths and to point out areas of our life which need attention. We must ask Him to keep our minds open so that His light may shine in upon all our thoughts, words and deeds. This is how we *receive* the Lord's influx.

Once we have received the inner heat and light which the Lord shines into our minds, we must then take what He has shown us and put it to work. We must *transform* it from mere knowledge and ideals into words and deeds, and we must do this faithfully, daily, and with determination. In doing this, we are imitating the very qualities which the Lord Himself displayed during His life in this world. "I have given you an example," the Lord said after washing His disciples' feet, "that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). We simply cannot find any lasting significance in our lives unless we do things to contribute to the welfare of others, that is, unless we make ourselves useful to them.

We *transmit* the Lord's power and love to others when we act and speak in loving and just ways *because this is what He desires of us*. Through our own lives, we can allow Him to *affect* others and draw them to Himself. The Lord Himself delights in such a life. And He shares this joy with us by allowing us to sense the influence of His power working within us, leading and inspiring us, and affecting others with His Spirit.

If we choose, we can lead significant lives. No one will build monuments to us, nor will future historians study the details of our lives. But to the degree that our lives *receive, transform* and *transmit the Lord's glory and strength* to others, we will leave a positive mark upon the spirits of all those who are inspired by our lives. We may never know who these people are. But that should not concern us, for this is the Lord's work, in which we are to become His willing instruments. Our task is to focus our minds and lives upon cooperating with the Lord daily, so that He may inspire us and fill us with heavenly delight as we learn to walk with Him.

The Lord is the Vine, and we are the branches. A vine produces fruit only on its branches and not on its main stem. So also, the Lord wills that He may reach out to others *through our lives* and draw all people to find eternal joy with Him. "'For in these I delight,' says the Lord."

Amen.

Readings: Psalm 8; John 15:1-8; *Charity* 158