

REFLECTIONS

Theme Based Ministry Newsletter of the Unitarian Church of Calgary
Volume 1, Issue 2 • October 2014

What does it mean to live a life of Purpose?

October's theme:

Purpose

Oct 5 – Purpose

Oct 12 – What is Done on Purpose?

Oct 19 – Pete Seeger: A Life of Purpose

Oct 26 – Giving with Purpose

“Purpose is what makes the magic happen.” says a woman whose UU faith draws deeply from the Wiccan and Witchcraft traditions, which, she explains, see purpose and intention as the “real magical power” in any of their “spells.”

There is such a resonance with that idea!

Hindus also treat purpose as a central theme. Purpose—or “rajas” as they call it—is the force that saves human beings from life’s primary negative force: “tamas”—their word for worldly depression. This tension between purpose and depression is seen as life’s primary battle and determines whether one is born higher or lower on the life scale when one is reincarnated. This seems an especially important perspective for our “culture of happiness” to pay attention to! Feeling depressed? Feeling like life has lost meaning? Experiencing existential angst? Our culture tends to say: “Go out and find out what makes you feel good.” Forget that, say the Hindus. What you really need to find is your purpose!

Purpose brings us back to life. I love that.

Do be careful say our Hindu friends. The pursuit of purpose is more dangerous than you might think. Rajas (purpose) without an awareness of Sattva (oneness and interconnection) leads to destruction. Think of purpose as fire. Yes, fire in the belly is needed to get one moving or pull one out of depression, but getting too “fired up” about one’s purpose can lead to blindness and callousness. (Think about a CEO cheating or laying off employees to “build the company” or about what Hitler or Stalin did to “elevate humanity.”) So ultimately purpose is about making us more and connecting us to others, not just getting us from point A to point B. You don’t have to be Hindu to say amen to that. You don’t have to be Wiccan to celebrate this kind of wonderful magic. Find your purpose. Make sure it serves others as well as yourself. Then watch yourself magically come to life!

May this “spell” be cast on all our lives this month,

Namaste - Rev Debra

Edited from a reflection by Rev Scott Tayler co-creator of the Theme Based Sharing Circle

Upcoming Services

October 5 <i>Purpose</i>	October 12 <i>What is Done on Purpose?</i>
<p>Description: Frederick Buechner said “Purpose is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.” This month we explore living a life of/with purpose.</p> <p>*This service will include a Ceremony of Covenant with Danielle Webber our Student Minister</p>	<p>Description: On Thanksgiving, we celebrate the earth’s bounty and sharing it. We acknowledge that the holiday is also the recognition of European colonization of the New World. When these explorers came to this continent, they had purpose. History shows that a consequence of that purpose caused pain and suffering to countless First Peoples. Even at our very the best we too may unintentionally devalued the inherent worth and dignity of others. Since purpose can be perverted and destructive, what steps can we take to make sure our actions create good in the world?</p>
Presenter Rev. Debra Faulk	Presenter Chris Rothbauer, Intern Minister
Service Associate Chris Rothbauer, Intern Minister and Danielle Webber, Student Minister	Service Associate Danielle Webber, Student Minister
Music Jane Perry, Music Director with UUPhonia	Music Jane Perry, Music Director
October 19 <i>Pete Seeger: A Life of Purpose</i>	October 26 <i>Giving with Purpose</i>
<p>Description: In our ‘spirituality of ...’ services we select a musician who has offered by their life and music inspiration and/or challenge; musicians whose art has increased understanding and/or contributed to justice. Pete Seeger’s music and the example of his life have done all these things.</p>	<p>Description: We give of our time and resources to that which we value and feel has purpose or fulfills our sense of purpose. This community is one place we give of ourselves, may it be on and with purpose.</p> <p>* Everyone is invited to Stewardship Lunch following the service.</p>
Presenter Rev. Debra Faulk	Presenter Rev Debra Faulk & the Stewardship Team
Service Associate Danielle Webber, Student Minister	Service Associate Chris Rothbauer, Intern Minister and Danielle Webber, Student Minister
Music Pete Seeger Tribute Band (Dave Bradt, Greg O’Neil, Cora Castle, Jane Perry)	Music Jane Perry, Music Director with UUPhonia

*Alternative Wednesday Vespers services offered on 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month (Oct 1st in room 4 and 15th in downstairs theater) from 7:30-8:15pm

Getting Started: October's Spiritual Exercise

Write Your Personal Mission Statement!

This month—as a way of engaging our question of “What does it mean to live a life of purpose?”—you are challenged to identify and share your personal purpose or mission statement. Don't make it more complicated than it needs to be. There is no “right way” or “proper format.” The goal is to write or find a set of words that articulate the core values or goals that give your life purpose and meaning.

What drives you? What's the “bottom line” of your life? What values or commitments distinguish your life from others? What guides your decisions and priorities? Why are you here? At your funeral, what do you hope people will say your life was about? These are the types of questions that this exercise asks of you.

And be sure to boil it down! The exercise is most useful if you keep narrowing and trimming your list. Truth is, our lives are driven by many purposes. That's natural and normal, but it can also be a problem. In fact, for many of us, it is the problem. We have too many competing goals and values pulling us in dozens of directions, all at the same time. We've lost a sense of what the purpose is! The point of it all. The bottom line. The ultimate aim—or few core aims—that all other aims serve.

Simply put, “people of purpose” are clear about what their life's purpose is! So this month, let's work to get clear for ourselves.

Some Specific Guidance:

First of all, remember: there is no one way or right way to do this! For instance, here are few different ways to approach the exercise:

APPROACH #1: Let The Internet Guide You Through It

There's a clever automated program on the web that helps people create their own personal mission statement. It is found at: <http://www.franklincovey.com/msb/>. [requires login]. It asks you questions about core areas of life and then translates your answers into a concise statement of purpose. The program allows you to go back and refine your answers and statements.

APPROACH #2: Take Inspiration from Others

In the “For Inspiration” section of this packet, you will find various statements of purpose from different people—from Gandhi to Benjamin Franklin to a few anonymous statements that have even boiled down their purpose to a single sentence. Use these diverse approaches to inspire your own.

APPROACH #3: Pick A Poem or Quote That Speaks for You

It's not cheating to let the words of others capture your purpose. Many of us have taped a poem on our mirror or put a quote at the end of our email messages to keep us focused on who we want to be every day. Instead of writing your personal mission statement from scratch, maybe spend this month sorting through the poems and quotes that have been important to you over the years and bring in the one that best captures your life's purpose.

And of course, you may find an entirely different approach than these. That's great! But no matter the approach or format, be sure to bring it in to share with your group.

Taking It to the Next Level

Some of us may want—and have time—to go beyond the basic assignment of writing our personal mission statement and bringing it in to share. Here are some ideas if you want to take the exercise to the next level:

1. Identify a way to keep your mission statement in front of you each day. Forgetting is easy. We need practices and strategies for keeping our core purpose in front of us on a regular basis. So what's yours? Taping it to your mirror? Putting it in your email signature line? Memorizing it and saying it out loud every morning as part of your daily meditation?
2. Read a book about a person of purpose. Biographies and autobiographies are all about people trying to articulate the core purpose that drove one's life or tied it all together. Pick an autobiography or biography of a person you admire and learn more about what their guiding purpose was.
3. Include those around you. After you are done with your personal mission statement, consider working with your children, your partner, or your close circle of friends to create a statement that captures what your family (be it biological or chosen) is all about. You can also invite your partner or close friend to do the exercise and then compare your statements. How do your core purposes support each other? How do they compete? What might it all mean for how you need to support each other or alter your patterns of behaviour and interaction?

Make your purpose proud. Writing your mission statement is great. Acting on it is even better! Pick one significant action that leads to your purpose showing up in your life or the life of others. Or maybe take an entire week and challenge yourself daily with this question: "How can I put my purpose into action today?"

Examples of Personal Mission Statements

Gandhi's mission statement

Mahatma Gandhi's mission is captured in a short list of active statements. You can craft your mission in this style, starting each sentence with "I shall" or "I will."

Let the first act of every morning be to make the following resolve for the day:

I shall not fear anyone on Earth.
I shall fear only God.
I shall not bear ill will toward anyone.
I shall not submit to injustice from anyone.
I shall conquer untruth by truth.
And in resisting untruth, I shall put up with all suffering.

Rev. Karen Anderson's mission statement

"When people amble through a graveyard in a hundred years, I want them to stop at my tombstone, befuddled over a simple sketch: a drawing of a tightrope walker taking the first step." (from her book "Glad to Be Human")

Erma Bombeck's mission statement

The poem, "If I Had My Life to Live Over," written by Erma Bombeck near the end of her life, details the values Bombeck wished had guided her daily decisions. If you were nearing the end of your life and you were writing this, what would you include? Use those ideas to craft your mission statement.

If I had my life to live over,
I would have talked less and listened more.
I would have invited friends over to dinner even if the carpet was stained and the sofa faded.
I would have eaten the popcorn in the 'good' living room and worried much less about the dirt when someone wanted to light a fire in the fireplace.
I would have taken the time to listen to my grandfather ramble about his youth.
I would never have insisted the car windows be rolled up on a summer day because my hair had just been teased and sprayed.
I would have burned the pink candle sculpted like a rose before it melted in storage.
I would have sat on the lawn with my children and not worried about grass stains.
I would have cried and laughed less while watching television—and more while watching life.
I would have shared more of the responsibility carried by my husband.
I would have gone to bed when I was sick instead of pretending the earth would go into a holding pattern if I weren't there for the day.
I would never have bought anything just because it was practical, wouldn't show soil or was guaranteed to last a lifetime.
Instead of wishing away nine months of pregnancy, I'd have cherished every moment and realized that the wonderment growing inside me was the only chance in life to assist God in a miracle.
When my kids kissed me impetuously, I would never have said, "Later. Now go get washed up for dinner."
There would have been more "I love you's." More "I'm sorry's."
But mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute... look at it and really see it ... live it...and never give it back.

Anonymous Mission Statements

"My mission is to give, for giving is what I do best and I can learn to do better. I will seek to learn, for learning is the basis for growth, and growing is the key to living."

"Our Family Mission: No empty chairs."

"I want to be the kind of person my dog already thinks I am."

"To be humble. To say thanks to Life in some way, every day. To never react to abuse by passing it on. To find the self within that does and can look at all sides without loss. Finally, to go through life with a smile on my face and a twinkle in my eye."

Ben Franklin's mission: a list of governing values

Sometimes a mission statement can be a concise list of values, defined in your own words. Read through Benjamin Franklin's list of values and definitions to see if they spark any ideas for your own mission statement.

Temperance: Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.

Silence: Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.

Order: Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.

Resolution: Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.

Frugality: Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.

Industry: Lose no time; be always employed in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.

Sincerity: Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.

Justice: Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.

Moderation: Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.

Tranquility: Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.

Chastity: Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.

For Inspiration

Remember that these readings serve as “jumping off points.” They are not here to tell us how to “do it right.” Rather they serve as windows into how others have thought about what it means to be a person of deep listening. Hearing about the journeys of others, we are better able to think through our own.

There's a lot here. Don't attempt to absorb or analyze it all. Rather, think of it as a treasure chest that you are sifting through to find the jewel that speaks most strongly to your heart. Come to the meeting prepared to share the selection that resonates with or speaks most powerfully to the story of your own life right now.

Purpose is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

- Frederick Buechner

A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult for each other?

- George Eliot

...**Douglas Steere**, a Quaker teacher, says that the ancient question, “Who am I?” inevitably leads to a deeper one, “Whose am I?” – because there is no identity outside of relationship. You can't be a person by yourself. To ask “Whose am I?” is to extend the question far beyond the little self-absorbed self, and wonder, Who needs you? Who loves you? To whom are you accountable? To whom do you answer? Whose life is altered by your choices? With whose life, whose lives, is your own all bound up, inextricably, in obvious or invisible ways?

- Rev. Victoria Safford

“Wild Geese”

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what
it loves.
Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are
moving across the landscapes, over the prairies and the
deep trees, the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are
heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers
itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese,
harsh and exciting—over and over announcing your place in
the family of things.

- *Mary Oliver*

There must be another life, she thought, sinking back into
her chair, exasperated. Not in dreams; but here and now, in
this room, with living people. She felt as if she were
standing on the edge of a precipice with her hair blown
back; she was about to grasp something that just evaded
her. There must be another life, here and now, she
repeated. This is too short, too broken. We know nothing,
even about ourselves. We're only just beginning, she
thought, to understand, here and there. She hollowed her
hands in her lap, just as Rose had hollowed hers round her
ears. She held her hands hollowed; she felt that she
wanted to enclose the present moment; to make it stay; to
fill it fuller and fuller, with the past, the present and the
future, until it shone, whole, bright, deep with
understanding

- *Virginia Woolf, The Years (last chapter: Present Time)*

Purpose is not about being liked by other people, being
famous, or becoming rich. It is about knowing who you are
and putting that knowledge to use in a meaningful way.
Purpose allows us to see obstacles and challenges;
however, it allows us to see a way around them.

- *Iyanla Vanzant*

Everything we do is an act of poetry or a
painting if we do it with mindfulness. Growing
lettuce is poetry. Walking to the supermarket
can be a painting. When we do not trouble
ourselves about whether or not something is
a work of art, if we just act in each moment
with composure and mindfulness, each
minute of our life is a work of art. Even when
we are not painting or writing, we are still
creating. We are pregnant with beauty, joy,
and peace, and we are making life more
beautiful for many people.

- *Thich Nhat Hanh, Our Life is a Work of Art*

Your life purpose has an inner purpose and
an outer purpose. Inner purpose concerns
Being and is primary. Outer purpose
concerns doing and is secondary. ... Inner
and outer, however, are so intertwined that it
is almost impossible to speak of one without
referring to the other. Your inner purpose is
to awaken. It is as simple as that. You share
that purpose with every other person on the
planet – because it is the purpose of
humanity. Your inner purpose is an essential
part of the purpose of the whole, the
universe and its emerging intelligence. Your
outer purpose can change over time. It varies
greatly from person to person. Finding and
living in alignment with the inner purpose is
the foundation for fulfilling your outer
purpose. It is the basis for true success.
Without that alignment, you can still achieve
certain things through effort, struggle,
determination, and sheer hard work or
cunning. But there is no joy in such
endeavour, and it invariably ends in some
form of suffering.

- *Eckhart Tolle, A New Earth: Awakening to
Your Life's Purpose*

Refus de toute INTENTION, arme néfaste de la RAISON. À bas toutes deux, au second rang! Place a la magie! Place aux mystères objectifs!
Place a l'amour!
Place aux nécessités!

We reject all forms of INTENTION, the two edged, perilous sword of REASON. Down with both of them, back they go!
Make way for magic! Make way for objective mysteries!
Make way for love!
Make way for necessities!

Set against and balancing this total refusal is our complete responsibility.

The self-serving act remains attached to its author - it is stillborn.

Acts of passion break free because they are inherently dynamic.

Gladly we accept full responsibility for tomorrow.

Let rational effort turn backwards and concern itself with disengaging the present from the limbo of the past.

Our passions are shaping the future spontaneously, unpredictably, compulsively.

- *Canadian automatiste leader, Paul Emile Borduas*

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon? Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

- *Mary Oliver*

In the midst of the whirling day,
In the hectic rush to be doing,
In the frantic pace of life,
Pause here for a moment.

Catch your breath;
Relax your body;

Loosen your grip on life.

Consider that our lives are always unfinished business;

Imagine that the picture of our being is never complete;

Allow your life to be a work in progress.

- *Richard S. Gilbert, Life Is Always Unfinished Business*

I am always asking myself the question,
What is it you are struggling for? What is that vital thing the woods contain, possess, that you want? Why do you go back and back to the woods unsatisfied, longing to express something that is there and not able to find it? This I know, I shall not find it until it comes out of my inner self, until the God quality in me is in tune with the God in it. Only by right living and a right attitude towards my fellow man, only by intense striving to get in touch, in tune with the Infinite, shall I find that deep thing hidden there, and that will not be until my vision is clear enough to see, until I have learned and fully realize my relationship to the Infinite.

- *Emily Carr, Hundreds and Thousands, 54, written at age 60*

Questions for Discussion

Every month, Reflections will include a list of questions that engage the theme from unique angles. Consider which one resonates with you most? Which is “your question” so to speak? Take some time this month to read them over and notice which one sticks out to you. Let it grab you and then see where it leads. And of course, come to your group’s meeting ready to share your tale. (And yes, your question may not be one on the list at all, so please search beyond this list if that’s what you need.)

How has your purpose changed over time?

Often, when we are young, our purpose is all about fitting in. Then as we grow a bit older it switches to our work and building a career and what we “want to be when we grow up.” Then family often becomes our central purpose. After that, some begin to focus on serving needs greater than our own.

And for many, at the end of life, letting go becomes the purpose that matters most. What stage of life are you in and what unique purpose does that stage seem to be inviting you into right now?

Have you ever stumbled onto your true purpose while you were pursuing another?

We discover our purposes in roundabout ways. Sometimes it arises through intentional reflection; at other times, we stumble on it in surprising ways. Has your purpose ever caught you by surprise?

Have you ever run away from your purpose?

Have you ever had to embrace a purpose not completely of your own choosing?

Sometimes circumstances dictate our chosen purpose. Unplanned pregnancies, an illness, family members needing our help. All of these can cause our lives and our primary purposes to take a sharp turn. What was this like for you? How sharp was the turn?

When have you felt purposeless?

And what or who helped you out of that hard place?

Has purpose gotten more or less complicated for you?

Has your list of core purposes grown or narrowed to one simple thing?

Does your life have a “higher purpose”?

And what does “higher” even mean?

Do you feel like “God” or “Life” has a purpose “for your life”?

Extra Resources

Books

James Hillman, *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling*

Leo Tolstoy, *The Three Questions: A Moral Tale*

<http://www.online-literature.com/tolstoy/2736/>

Movies

The Bucket List

Pay It Forward

Groundhog Day

Videos

Simon Sinek's TED Talk on "Start With Why"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2SEPoQEgqA>

The 3 Questions: From Monty Python's *The Holy Grail* ("what is your quest")

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWS8Mg-JWSg>

Looking Ahead

The content for these packets is a group effort. I welcome submissions of your ideas of readings, stories, videos, visual images, questions, and spiritual exercises for each month's topic. While not everything will make it into this collection, it is useful for our worship team and our group facilitators. You can send submissions for November's topic of "Courage" by the third Sunday, October 19th, to debra@unitarianscalgary.org

Themes for 2014-15

September – Listening
October – Purpose
November – Courage
December – Connection

January – Character (ethics)
February – Passion
March – Freedom
April – Sustainability

May – Honesty
June – Imagination

Theme-based Listening Groups (TLCs) for 2014-15

We will begin monthly Theme-based Ministry Listening Groups in the coming year. For those interested in joining a group, registration will take place this month. Watch the e-news for more information.

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