

MONDAY MANNA

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‘WHY DO I DO WHAT I DO?’ A QUESTION ALL SHOULD ASK

By William ‘Fritz’ Klumpp

“You look pretty good,” my high school track coach said to me. “If you just wouldn’t run so long in one place.” This was his way of saying that I was not a very fast runner. My running style was like the man sitting in a rocking chair: there was a whole lot of activity, but not much progress.

In some ways this might be a metaphor for our personal and professional lives. We might be always on the go, very busy, but what have we accomplished? If we honestly conclude that we have achieved very little, why do we continue doing what we do? We might look good – but show little progress.

Many of us idealistically start out doing something we feel will give meaning to our lives, but sometimes we become disillusioned. Being a veteran pilot in the U.S. Navy, I observed that well-intentioned people who began their careers in the military experienced this. Especially if they spent time on the battlefield. The realities of war can lead to disillusionment, and the resulting loss of purpose can even contribute to what has become known as PTSD – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

This same disillusionment can also be suffered by those who engage in other important pursuits, such as politics and the workplace. We work hard, striving to make a difference in the world around us, but what happens when we look good and then discover we have been running too long in one place?

Everyone wants his or her life to count for something, and we all desire to live a life of meaning. I often think of what French scientist Blaise Pascal referred to as the “God-shaped vacuum” that exists in the heart of every man – a vacuum that only the Lord can fill. Author and speaker John Maxwell talks about another “vacuum”: the life-sized vacuum inside one’s heart that only a clearly defined life mission can fill.

During the last few years, I have studied the life of King Solomon, who has been known as the wisest man who ever lived. A son of David and Israel’s third king, he reigned during the 10th century BC. Ruling during Israel’s golden age, his achievements were absolutely amazing. Yet, despite all he accomplished, Solomon’s summation, expressed near the end of his life and recorded numerous times in his Book of Ecclesiastes, was “all is vanity.” Another translation states, “everything is meaningless.”

Examining the life of Solomon and all he accomplished, I cannot help but ask, “How could one who started so well and did so much, come to the end of his life and conclude that all the things that he did were meaningless?” Solomon’s conclusion that “*all is vanity and grasping for the wind*” (Ecclesiastes 1:14) pertains to works done “*under the sun*.” Basically, that includes everything. If meaningful purpose in life cannot be found “under the sun,” that suggests we must look elsewhere for meaning. Years ago, after reaching a similar conclusion about my life, I realised that we must look to the heavenlies. If we are to find real meaning and purpose in life, we must look to God Himself.

My long-time friend and mentor, Joe Coggeshall, challenged me for many years to write a “life purpose statement.” Successful companies have a purpose or mission statement, Joe would say, “so why don’t you?” I finally took his challenge to heart and have found my written life purpose has become a compass allowing me to forsake the good for the sake of seeking the best.

So, what is your purpose and why do you do what you do? Do you have a purpose or mission statement for your life? If not, why not?

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

Have you ever had any moments in your life – or work – when someone could have described you as “looking pretty good, but running too long in one place”? Perhaps this is how you are feeling right now. How do you respond at times like this?

What do you find meaningful in your life? Are you confident that you are striving for, working toward, the right things? Or do you sometimes feel like the highly accomplished King Solomon, who despite the wondrous projects he had completed and all his material wealth, concluded, “all is meaningless, a chasing after the wind?” Explain your answer.

The well-known paraphrase from Blaise Pascal is cited: “inside the heart of everyone is a God-shaped void that only God can fill”? Do you agree with that? Why or why not?

Mr. Klumpp mentions having a personal purpose or mission statement. Have you ever heard of something like that? What do you think someone’s mission statement for life would look like? How do you think that could be useful?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Acts 17:28

1 Corinthians 3:9

Philippians 3:10 (Amplified Version)