

What do I do now? Did you ever ask yourself that question? I'll bet you have!

A young man quits high school and starts looking for work so he can put gas in his '77 Camero! But after six months of flipping burgers at McDonald's he discovers that getting away from his parents is as easy, nor as much as fun as he thought it would be. And he begins to wonder, "What do I do now?"

A woman returns to the doctor's office after the tests and hears the physician say that she has six months to live, and she begins to ask herself, "What do I do now?" And when she is gone, her husband of 45 years is faced with the same question, "What do I do now?" "What is the meaning of my life now?"

A young woman works her way through college, then through graduate school to earn her M.B.A. But when she submits her resume to dozens of companies and is turned down in one interview after another, she begins to wonder, "What do I do now?"

The gray haired minister has had a wonderful career, worked long and hard and won the praise of people in the pew and peers alike, but now he has come to retirement. He does a few interim ministries, but then says, "Enough!" And he goes home and sits down in front of the TV and begins to do nothing. He doesn't have a hobby, and he doesn't want to play golf every day, and before too long he asks himself, "What do I do now?" "What is the meaning of my life now?"

"What do I do now?" It is the question of life which we all ask in one form or another. It is the question for the day! "What is the meaning of my life now?"

How do we answer that question. Some people answer that there is no ultimate meaning to life. There is no meaning to life other than that which we create or stumble across or carve out of life for ourselves. One of the 20th cynics said that life is like a bottle of cheap wine which leaves a bad taste in the mouth. Another said that all of life is futile and the only truly philosophical question is whether or not to commit suicide.

We have all heard it and known people who struggled with it. "Vanity of vanities," said the ancient preacher whose words are recorded in the Old Testament book Ecclesiastes. "All is vanity!" There is no ultimate, overarching meaning or purpose in life, so there is nothing better for us to do than to eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we may die.

“What do I do now?” “What is the meaning of my life now?” It was sung by Elvis Costello. Do you know Elvis Costello? I know about Elvis Presley, and Lou Costello, but this man is someone entirely different. He is a British rock-n-roll, sometimes country and western, sometimes punk rock singer, who was named Declan McManus at birth in Liverpool, England, but who changed his name to suit his singing and song writing career. When his marriage, or some other relationship went up in flames, he wrote this song.

Quickly she came dressed up for fame
Riding her perfume downstairs
Make-up like glue, she danced round the room
To the sound of her corduroy flares
Let's go to town, taxis all round
We could stop for a couple of beers
He looks at it all stifles a yawn
She tries not to look like she cares

Chorus:

What do I do now? Are we going under? What did I do wrong?
I thought we had it sorted out the other day
Maybe I'm just stupid, Can't we try again?
No one told me it was raining (raining, raining)

What do I do now? Are we going under? What did I do wrong?
Thought we had it sorted
Is there someone else? Am I too familiar?
Was it when I said I wanted to have children?
Tore up all your photos, didn't feel too clever
Spent the whole of Sunday sticking you together
Now I'd like to call but I feel too awkward
Some things need explaining
No one told me it was raining (raining, raining...)

What do I do now? What do I do to find some meaning in my life today? That is the question for the day. But what is the answer? Well, I don't know! Or maybe I do! Without giving a long dissertation, let me offer a some observations and suggest an answer from the Christian faith.

Victor Frankl was an Austrian psychiatrist who spent three years in the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz. In those days he spent his time observing and working with fellow Jews suffering at the hands of Hitler. He came to believe the search for meaning is the primary

force in human life. He said,

"The meaning of our existence is not invented by ourselves, but rather detected." "What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general, but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment."

He met many people who gave in to their suffering and gave up the will to live. But he met others who found the reason and will to live in a purpose beyond themselves.

A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life. He knows the "why" for his existence, and will be able to bear almost any "how."

Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct.

What do we do now?

Work on some relationship!

Find some great project in which to engage yourself!

Take up some work which will involve your mind and heart and strength and energy!

And when it is finished, take up something else worth of your time and efforts!

Not enough can be said about the value of human relationships in giving life meaning and purpose, zest and joy. It was brought home to me recently in reading a commencement address given by a medical doctor by the name of Abraham Verghese, delivered at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania in June 2001.

The doctor talked about his experience of taking care of young men with HIV in Johnson City, Tennessee. He learned an important lesson about the meaning of life from his patients. He said when young men in the prime of his life finds out that he has HIV,

It is as though you have been swept off the foot path of life and placed in a crucible in which all the reactions of life were speeded up and there is only so much enzyme and substrate left before the reaction ends.

When young men at the tail ends of their lives asked themselves where did meaning reside, they found that meaning did not reside in good looks, reputation, or power, or money, instead they found that meaning resided in the successful relationships they formed over time, particularly with their parents, as well as their significant others.

I can't tell you how many young men said to me, "Abraham I would not wish this disease on my worst enemy. And yet, in a funny way, this was the best thing that happened to me. But for this disease I would have spent another twenty years in the big city, gotten the call one day that my father was ill, jetted down for the funeral, spent another twenty years pursuing all the things I wished to pursue without realizing that at the tail end of my life, the thing I would value most would be this connection with my parents."

How vitally important are those human connections.

The famous Albert Schweitzer put it this way in a commencement address to college graduates. "I don't know what your destiny in life will be, but this I do know, those of you who find out how to serve will be the happiest."

Those of us who find out how to connect our lives with people, in causes great and small, will find life rich with meaning and purpose.

What do I do now? What is the meaning of my life now?

Here is the perspective of the Christian faith: Our lives do not belong to us alone! Our whole lives belong to the One who gave us life, and the purpose of our lives is to discover how we can live our lives in grateful response to the great gift of life.

That what the meaning and purpose which drove the Apostle Paul across the ancient world preaching and teaching the message of Jesus Christ.

We can be certain that the Apostle Paul must have had some of those "What do I do now?" moments.

When as a young man he began to hear the talk about Jesus being the Messiah, what would he do? His Jewish upbringing told him that the Messiah would sweep into the land of Israel and sweep the enemies out. But he heard that Jesus refused to take up the sword, counseled the Jews to turn the other cheek to the Romans, and died on a cross. He tried to stab the church in its cradle, dragging the followers of Jesus into court, accusing them of betraying the sacred traditions of Israel.

But one day he was struck by a light and a voice and he was converted to Christ. He was blinded and dumbfounded and spent the next several years out in the Syrian desert asking himself, "What do I do now?"

And after he started traveling the high seas, barging into synagogues, preaching the message of Christ, he encountered a lot of opposition; he was stoned and shipwrecked, beaten and thrown into prison. And there must have been many times when he sat in his

cell asking himself, "What do I do now?"

There were times when he had to move on, start over and find a fresh new group of people who would listen to his message. But through it all, he kept his eye on the prize, he kept his vision focused on his goal, knowing Christ, preaching Christ, living for Christ. It became the passion of his life. It became the purpose of his life. And it spilled out of his pen onto the pages of the Philippian letter.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his suffering by becoming like him in his death.

Paul was not a man to do things half way; once his mind was made up, it was all or nothing, no matter what the consequences.

And he never tried to fool himself, he recognized his imperfections and realized his need for refinement,

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

And he was no quitter; once he saw the end in sight, he worked even harder to reach the goal,

forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

And he discovered a great purpose and meaning to his life.

The church was filled with people, and the bride and groom and all their attendants were in place, standing in the front of the church, and they were all looking at me, ready for me to begin the wedding ceremony. But I had forgotten to bring my wedding book into the sanctuary, and I could not remember what to say. And I began to panic, thinking, "What do I do now?" For a moment I stood there, then I said to myself, "I will wake up." And I did, and the nightmare was over.

What do we do now? Take up the cause of love and care and compassion and service and friends. And we will discover life rich with goodness every day!