



**MAKING THE MOMENT MEANINGFUL**  
Creating a Path to Purpose and Fulfillment

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For Sharon  
and  
for all who feel the yearning for meaningfulness.

*The best cause requires a good pleader.*  
- Dutch Proverb

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*Happiness requires something to do, something to love and something to hope for.*

- Swahili Proverb

PART I:  
WHAT LIFE IS ABOUT

*A man should live if only to satisfy his curiosity.*  
- Yiddish Proverb

## CHAPTER 1 YEARNING TO BE SIGNIFICANT

*This life is your one opportunity to shape the world in  
which you live.*



Early in 2006, I received a letter from a friend's husband who was ruminating over what to do with the second half of his life. He wrote that what he would do was not clear, but he was certain it had to be significant—something larger than himself.

Two years later, I had a telephone conversation with my friend herself. The topic? She struggled with the question of what to do with her life. She was working but wasn't sure if her job was where she should be spending her time. She worried about retirement—that is, not having enough resources set aside in order to live in her retirement years.

My friend and her husband are not alone. Over the years, I have had several conversations with people who desired to “do something meaningful” or “make a difference” or “leave a legacy.” Books have been written with the intent of answering the question, “What should I do with my life?”

One morning not too long ago, I turned on the radio to listen to my regular public radio station, and they were doing a story about a woman in Minnesota who was selling everything she owned, keeping only her important papers, and driving west to find a simpler life. She acknowledged that the things she owned didn't make her happy. She believed that a life uncomplicated with things would allow her to find the happiness she sought.

The yearning to feel significant is experienced by people who have done little with their lives up to now and

by those who can tout a long list of achievements. Success  
in the form

of wealth, position, status, or fame has not satisfied this longing to matter.

Why is it that we wait until we have lived a half century or so before we decide to do something that we can label as significant? Does the yearning only begin then? Is it that we begin to think that our time is running out? Is it that we lose our amusement with the capitalistic carousel? Is this mid-life angst just a reflection of our voracious appetite for bigger and better?

***Do you feel the yearning?***

You were born to be significant. This life is your one opportunity to shape the world in which you live. You can choose to be a volunteer and shape your world to your specifications, or you can be a victim and let circumstances dictate your design. You can choose to ensure your significance in this world for your whole life or only for a part of it. That is to say, you don't have to wait until much of your life is past before thinking about the legacy that you leave. The earlier you begin to live meaningfully, the greater the impact you make on your world.

You can never know how long, when measured by time, your life could be. You did not enter this world with a guarantee of time. You may be around for another fifty years, and there are those whose lives lasted less than fifty seconds. Fortunately, the significance of life isn't judged by its length. Significance is determined by the meaningfulness of the time you spend. Your activities and actions and the motivation for them are relevant to meaningfulness regardless of how much time you feel you have left in life.

Life is short when measured by the things you can do with it. There are so many things you can do and certainly not enough time to do them all. The challenge, then, is to choose your actions and activities meaningfully. You must

develop the decision-making skill to enable you to say yes to the things that matter and no to those that are of little importance. Every moment you give to insignificance diminishes your life's value. If you devote forty to fifty years of life to things that don't matter, you will have missed so much of life that could be lived fulfilling the yearning for significance.

You were born to be significant, and this innate instinct can be ignored only for a short time. If you live long enough to get past the social norms of getting an education, landing a job, starting a family, and/or acquiring possessions, the yearning to be significant will emerge in the question, Now what? You may respond to the question by repeating the cycle, believing that doing more satisfies the yearning. So you get another degree. Maybe you find a job that pays more money or carries more prestige. Perhaps you have another child to add to the family. You may buy more and/or bigger things. Despite doing and having more, the yearning is still there.

Unable to satisfy the yearning with more, you may seek fulfillment by having something different. You move. You change professions. You get divorced and, perhaps, remarry. Still there is a sense of dissatisfaction.

Now time has passed, you are older, and you begin to feel your mortality. The feeling of mortality serves to intensify the yearning to be significant.

Eventually this yearning to be significant will push its way to the point of priority and urgency. It may happen after your children have all grown up and left home. The yearning is then expressed as the "empty nest syndrome." It may happen when you retire and a day-to-day job is no longer in the way. You may then begin to question your worth because your work was where you placed your importance. It may happen during a financial hardship when you've lost your job and/or lost the things that have occupied your mind and time. You begin to learn that

things don't matter.

The instinct for significance is always present. When rearing children, working a job, tending to things, and other business no longer suppress it, you will hear its cry and feel its yearning. You need not wait—and should not wait—until much of your life is behind you before you begin your quest to discover what will satisfy the yearning. The way to maximize the significance of your life is to make each moment meaningful from the beginning. Choose a course of education that highlights your talents and abilities, not the one that just heightens your earning potential. Make parenting a meaningful experience for you, your partner, and your children. Seek employment with more than just making money in mind. Don't rest your identity and your value in your possessions. Establish a view of your life that allows you to see clearly what is meaningful and augments your living. Then you can avoid the things that consume and waste the precious little time that you have to shape your world.



