

October Theme

Purpose: The Practice of Bravery

A coward is incapable of exhibiting love; it is the prerogative of the brave.

~ Mahatma Gandhi

Introduction

In moments of challenge or quiet contemplation, it is our natural human tendency to seek meaning in our living, to find a noble design to unite and support all our efforts around a larger narrative. In the face of our mortality, we long for our lives to *matter*. When we find that noble direction, all our energetic output gains focus and we can live intentionally, with purpose. Modern metrics have shown correlation between purpose and well-being: we are happiest when oriented to a higher aim beyond our own immediate needs and desires. The mundanities of the day-to-day do not fully satisfy the human spirit.

Living one's life with purpose means dedicating the heart to an aim greater than one's own ephemeral happiness. Purpose emerges from knowing our deepest values and must be internally defined, not externally assigned. Distillation of one's experiences and wisdom, often found in quiet contemplation or the catharsis of hardship, can bring one to the hallmarks of found purpose: certainty and resolve. Out of this, bravery grows organically.

Bravery exists only within the context of fear: in acting bravely, we are overcoming. Often perceived as a quality associated with battle and imminent danger, truly we all engage daily in small acts of bravery in the face of our real struggles and perceived limitations. Our humble conquests may be less notable but are no less noble. A 'yes' can be brave, a 'no' even more so at times.

Purposeful living and bravery share the common qualities of passion and conviction. Both qualities require that we move beyond our own immediate concerns, our small selves, and commit to something larger. The inherent sacrifice of such an understanding further strengthens and solidifies our intention. The actions of lived purpose and bravery may be small or large, but the hearts' commitment is always grand in scale.

Without passion, purpose may devolve into one of its lesser forms: personal accomplishment, productivity and compulsion. While it may resemble the dogged perseverance of high ambition, lived purpose is characterized by its heart qualities: joy, deep commitment, and love that self-renew, allowing for lifelong dedication. Bravery without true conviction and passion may become bravado, a self-absorbed state rather than a selfless one. Enlivened and invigorated by deep conviction, lives of purpose and bravery swell beyond the confines of time and space, creating positive impact in the larger world.

Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:

1. What is the purpose of bravery?
2. Describe times in your life when you have felt brave or have practiced bravery.
3. How do you know when to pay attention to your purpose?
4. What do you think of when you hear the word purpose? Do you have a sole purpose?
5. Is there danger in blind attention to purpose?
6. What have you had to sacrifice in order to fulfill your purpose?
7. What does it take for you to be brave? How do you gather your courage?
8. Is bravery required of you to discover your purpose? Explain.

Quotes and Short Readings

Is there something about men that leads them to seize on Purpose more readily and compromise integrity more easily? And if so, how do we change that? It seems like a lot of leadership education is aimed at getting women to be more like men: to own their accomplishments out loud, to negotiate more fiercely, to power pose their way to more confidence. What about training men to do more self-examination (part of the purpose of the Center for Courage & Renewal, of course), to shut up sometimes, to spend more energy on care and interpersonal communication and less on accomplishment and attracting the spotlight?

~ Courtney Martin, "Dear Parker: Purpose With a Capitol P", On Being website

Play needs no purpose. That is why play can go on and on as long as players find it meaningful. After all, we do not dance in order to get somewhere. We need this kind of experience to correct our worldview. We are so caught up in purpose that we would feel more comfortable if God shared our preoccupation with work. But God plays. The birds in a single tree are sufficient proof that God did not set out with a divine no-nonsense attitude to make a creature that would perfectly achieve the purpose of a bird. What could that purpose be I wonder? There are titmice, juncos, and chickadees; woodpeckers, gold finches, starlings, and crows. The only bird God never created is the no-nonsense bird.

~ Br. David Steindl-Rast

Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.

~ Carl Jung

I wish to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life. I wish to learn what life has to teach, and not, when I come to die, discover that I have not lived. I do not wish to live what is not life, living is so dear, nor do I wish to practice resignation, unless it is quite necessary. I wish to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life...

~ Henry David Thoreau

Every person born into this world represents something new, something that never existed before, something original and unique. It is the duty of every person in Israel to know and consider that he is unique in the world in his particular character, and that there has never been someone like him before. For if there had been someone like him before, there would be no need for him to be in the world. Every single person is a new thing in the world and is called upon to fulfill his particularity in the world.

~ Martin Buber

Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broke world waits in darkness for the light that is you.

~ L.R. Knost

For more on this month's theme go to: <http://uuac.org/worship/themes-for-spiritual-practice/>

The Worship Associates are: Matt Andrus, Jeff Brown, Jen Ryan Brown, Alexandra Businger (chair), Alan Cantor, Erin Collier, Jess Jonas, Katherine McHugh, and Gary Strichartz.

If you could do anything without chance of failure, and without constraints of time and money, what would you do? If you know your purpose, your deepest desire, then the secret of success is to discipline your life so that you support your deepest purpose and minimize distractions and detours.

~ David Deida

Do not let your fire go out, spark by irreplaceable spark in the hopeless swamps of the not-quite, the not-yet, and the not-at-all. Do not let the hero in your soul perish in lonely frustration for the life you deserved and have never been able to reach. The world you desire can be won. It exists.. it is real.. it is possible.. it's yours.

~ Ayn Rand, Atlas Shrugged

When you put down what is in your hand you are left with what's in your heart and you can't put that down.

~ Mark Bonchek

Silence helps draw together the scattered and dissipated energies of a fragmented existence. It helps us to concentrate on a purpose that really corresponds not only to the deeper needs of our own being but also to God's intentions for us.

~ Thomas Merton

When you create a purpose, your whole life changes. Unlike a goal, which establishes some end point in an already existing direction, when you create a new purpose it establishes a new direction for your life, and given that the direction of your life has changed, your whole life changes.

~ Werner Erhard

Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am.

~ Parker J. Palmer

Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go out and do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.

~ Howard Thurman

Safe is good for sidewalks and swimming pools but life requires risk if we are to get anywhere.

~ Simon Sinek

Be brave. Take risks. Nothing can substitute experience.

~ Paulo Coelho

Take chances, make mistakes. That's how you grow. Pain nourishes your courage. You have to fail in order to practice being brave.

~ Mary Tyler Moore

I love those who can smile in trouble, who can gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection. 'Tis the business of little minds to shrink, but they whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves their conduct, will pursue their principles unto death.

~ Leonardo da Vinci

We could never learn to be brave and patient, if there were only joy in the world.

~ Helen Keller

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