

How To Live A Significant Life

Dr. Richard D. Dobbins

<http://www.drdoobbins.com/guidelines-for-great-living/articles/how-to-live-a-significant-life/>

“Many people confuse the concepts of success and significance. They are distinctly different concepts. If you want to build a successful life, you to make it to the top of the ladder in your field. To build a significant life you have to discover meaning and purpose along the way. It is far easier to become successful in life than it is to lead a significant life. Many successful people lack meaning and significance in their lives.”

Significance in Life Is More Important Than Success

Success is relatively easy to obtain when compared with significance. For example, the other day I was talking to a cardiologist friend of mine and he was sharing with me that he is attempting to mentor a medical student in the practice of Christian medicine. He was explaining to the intern that he would go through several stages in reaching the top of his field. He cautioned the intern that, when he reached the top, there would be nothing there.

He was warning the intern that, if in the process of climbing the ladder you have lost a sense of personal significance and meaning so that the practice of medicine is no longer a calling but just a means of making a livelihood, then success means nothing. As successful as you become you will have failed in your search for a significant life. Building significance into life involves much more than becoming successful at what you do.

Many Americans miss this distinction. They get geared up; they go through all the educational procedures, all the professional procedures to reach the top of whatever field they are tackling. Then they believe that, once they are there, significance will be a by-product of success. But significance comes from building meaning and purpose into your life, some other meaning than just being the best and the greatest and making the most money of any person in your field.

A Significant Life Assumes Providence

Building significance into life is difficult for those who are agnostic or atheist, but for a Christian significance begins by knowing that God has a purpose for my life. I am not simply doing something for me or even for the community. I am doing something for Him, which means that the purpose for my life is not over when my life is over, that I will go on to some future judgment of my life, and the deeds that I have done in my body will achieve some higher purpose of eternal meaning.

This for the Christian builds significance into life, significance that is much more important in the search for happiness than success. As we have said, many successful people are not happy. Happiness comes from leading a significant life, from doing something you feel only you can be doing.

Paul says in Ephesians 1:4 that we were chosen in Him from before the foundation of the world. You and I were no afterthought with God. Every Christian has a calling upon his or her life. It is God's work that we are doing. If you do not make that connection, then you feel like your life is without significance.

A Significant Life Implies Giftedness

Every child of God has gifts. But I think so many times we belittle the gifts God has given us while we are admiring the gifts He has given other people. But, we are all members of the same body and, as each of us discovers our gifts and we function together, the whole body accomplishes the will of God in this world.

Paul addresses the issue of giftedness in Romans 12. He speaks of the Christian's need to find the will of God for his or her life and about the unique gifts that God gives to each of His children. He defines gifts there that fall across a broad spectrum of human activity. Discover the gifts that you have and do not belittle them, (and do not envy the gifts that other people have) because these are the ways God has provided for you to serve Him.

The most pragmatic way to go about discovering your gifts is to ask two things about yourself. First of all, what would you really like to do for God that you really like to do? Because what God has gifted you to do, He has given you a satisfaction in doing. Second, over time discover those areas where you have exceptional skill and recognize these skills as gifts from God.

Significance Demands Diligence

Whatever you do, you should do energetically and enthusiastically, not only doing it well but also doing it heartily as unto the Lord. In Colossians 3, Paul talks about doing our work with all of our might as well as doing it unto the Lord. In Philippians 3 he talks about pressing toward the mark for the prize of the highest calling of God in Christ Jesus. There is that sense of diligence and intensity that comes into play when the Christian is doing what he feels gifted to do, what he likes to do, what adds to the significance of his life.

A person who is diligent about what he or she is doing gives the feeling of being responsible and willing to be held accountable for what he or she does. As a byproduct of diligence and significance, God blesses us with success.

The diligent person carries significance into the job place so that, regardless of the degree of success he has, there is a fulfillment that comes. When such people get to the top it is not success that fulfills them, it is the significance.

Significance Reflects Humility

Jesus taught us, “But he that is greatest among you, shall be your servant.” (Matthew 23:11). People leading significant lives know they have gifts. However, they know those gifts have been given to them by God; so there is no place for pride. In addition, they know God has given those gifts to them for the service of others; so, they want to be diligent in their stewardship of these gifts. A person who is leading a significant life is unimpressed with himself.

A successful person who feels the need to tell you just how successful he or she really is actually is telling you that his or her life lacks significance. You get the impression that if such people did not have all the invitations to speak, did not go to all the places they have been while doing all their important things, life would be meaningless for them. In fact, they have to tell you of all of these things so that you can be impressed with their success and your impression of their success is what gives them the little bit of significance their lives have. When there is no more applause, no more people to tell all their exploits to, these people are going to lack meaning and purpose in their lives.

On the other hand, a person may be going to all these places, doing all these things but, if he or she has a real significance that is born out of a sense of giftedness and God’s call, it is not necessary to try to impress you. Significant people do not need an audience. They are too involved doing what they are doing, doing it as unto the Lord, doing it heartily, that the One for whom they are doing it is the only One whose opinion they are really concerned about.

You can be successful without having a significant life, but you cannot have a significant life without being successful. Success without significance is hollow. God has a purpose for your life and if you will open your life to Him, confess your sins to Him and ask Him, He will reveal that purpose to you.

Nothing is as exciting as knowing in your heart that you are doing what God has gifted you to do, where He has called you to do it. This is the greatest high in life and God wants you to celebrate it!

