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- *How to live a fulfilled life*

God is present with each of you. This, of course, you know, but we always wish to begin with that assurance because too often you begin your days without that assurance, and you thereby lose that anchor that provides stability for your many activities. God is, of course, with you now, but as you know, God is always with you. It is up to you to be receptive. It is up to you to listen—not to plead, but to be receptive.

A life of fulfillment is really not necessarily a life devoted to action but one devoted to understanding. Real understanding is only achieved by listening. It is only achieved by quieting an impulse to do and to speak and to control and to initiate. A fulfilled life is a life that receives inspiration and direction from within as opposed to external influences. So often human beings are motivated to action on the basis of what others feel—a fear of what they feel or a fear of what they may do or a fear of how one is received. Curious that fear is so much a motivator for action. Lives would be so much more fulfilling if they weren't directed as a result of fear but rather as a result of commitment and understanding.

There are many avenues of life that feed this tendency to thrive on fear. Lives that are characterized by competition—personal, artistic, athletic, professional—those lives cannot truly be joyful lives. Yes, they may be viewed as successful by others who share the same motivation, but the really successful life is void of that competitive antagonism. Each of you should be committed to things that are important to *you*, not to issues or priorities that are dictated by others, be they individuals or society.

If you are to achieve significant, meaningful and lasting sense of accomplishment, allow yourselves to be motivated strictly from within, giving no power to what others may say or think. Direction in life is not a popularity contest in the end. It is a matter of vision. If you have a strong sense of where you want to go, because it is important to you, because it has intrinsic value for you, then you cannot really fail, because your lives can be measured as the fulfillment of what is most precious to you.

Lives really are fulfilled. There are obviously those whose lives are cut short by accident or illness or violence, but for others, their lives can indeed be measured and evaluated in terms of what was perceived as being important. It is not so essential that you reach the objectives, but rather that you have them. If you truly reach your goals and a sense of deep satisfaction surrounds you, that is not a sign that you are through. You have only begun. You have only achieved one step.

Being motivated in your lives means accepting a goal as valid. When that goal involves the betterment of others—helping others, encouraging others, inspiring others, teaching others—then those goals are worthy. Goals that are self-oriented to the exclusion of others are not in themselves invalid. Those goals that are formed by demands placed by others rather than yourself—those goals are not permanent in value. You should make a concerted effort to establish in your own life what is important to you. If others share that value system, fine. But the presence of others in that value system is not a guarantee of its validity.

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Indeed, a life of substance means marching to your own music. It means being honest with yourselves in all ways, accepting your failures and rejoicing in your achievements and being able to recognize and acknowledge both. A life that does not recognize its failures is blind, and a life that does not recognize its achievements has no guiding force to propel it forward. What criteria can you place upon your lives that will serve as a guide to a meaningful existence? The first and most important is a question of whether a goal affirms life. That life affirmation is not an empty recognition that life is, but that life must be and that life is sacred and that all lives are equal. An affirmation of life, therefore, accepts the sacredness and equality of all, both animate and inanimate.

The second question used as a yardstick for what is important: does it affirm the presence of God, by whatever name God may be called? If you affirm life and you affirm the presence of God, then life has meaning because of the presence of God, and the presence of God has meaning because of the sacredness of life. The two depend upon one another. The goals that you have in life to be truly worthy must address these two issues. All else falls into proper place when these issues are addressed. Issues of politics, economics, artistic efforts, social action—all of these activities are given direction and substance by these two questions. Too often mistakes in life would be avoided if the focus had been drawn first upon these two issues. You cannot exist without others; you cannot exist without God; you cannot exist without a recognition of a sacredness of all creation.

There is much, of course, that you do not understand, for knowledge is growth. If you have full understanding, there is no growth. Lives conducted meaningfully in some way or another provide a positive response to these two questions.

Peace in the world is achievable, but recognizing that fact, it does not follow that it will automatically be achieved, nor is there any presupposition of a timetable for that achievement. Those who work for peace are committed to the goal of peace. They are committed to the idea of peace. Whether or not that peace is realized within a particular lifespan is not in itself so important. It is the direction that humankind moves toward, however slowly, that is really important. Societies were not built overnight, problems of societies will not be rectified overnight, but the building of a society or the rectifying of the problems can only be achieved when there is a commitment.

It is up to you to find areas you are willing to commit your energies toward. Those energies may be prayerful, they may be reflective—they do not have to be active. Enabling the strength and power and presence of God to be felt worldwide requires commitment from each of you. The actions that are necessary will be gleaned from the process of commitment itself. Answers to your concerns do not automatically come in great haste, but if you have such concerns, you must be willing to listen for inspiration. For some concerns, the wait is enormously long and costly. For other concerns, the response is more quickly recognized.

Love you experience with another is an opportunity for growth, for affirmation, for recognition of God. It is therefore worthy for you to actively seek out those relationships that provide opportunities for listening, for compassion, for experiencing and giving. For some, the answer lies in another individual; for others, the answer lies in a group. It is unimportant

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ultimately in which arena one chooses to be active, one chooses to share. It is the sharing in whatever way that serves the purpose of affirmation of God and of others and of life, and it is from those affirmations that you sense direction, commitment, a prioritizing that has meaning and lasting value.

Simplify your lives by simplifying the identification of goals. More goals do not mean a better life and fewer goals a less worthy life. There is no one who counts how many goals you have. There is no one who counts how many fronts you are active in. There is no one who is ultimately concerned about the number of things you accomplish. All of those specifics are really meaningless. Certainly there are some who have numerous goals and seem to be successful in that multiple pursuit. For others, the goals are more narrowly defined, but both lives can really be viewed as equal. Commitment, affirmation, recognition are critically important in your relationships with others and in your desires to be effective human beings, to have worthy lives.

Our prayers are for your vision of goals that meet these criteria, for the patience which is necessary to sift what is essential from that which is not. We pray for your continued spiritual growth, for your strengthening, and for your expanding abilities to reach out, affirming another and affirming God's presence in your lives.

Amen.