

by  
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What do you want from life?

There are many who would answer you. First, the obvious answers from Madison Avenue, which I trust you do not take too seriously, the trappings of the affluent society: food and drink, martinis and charcoal broiled steaks from your very own backyard grill; the status symbols: house, sports cars, vacation spots, clothes, gadgets, hobbies, and the money to make all these possible. Material security and success, pleasure and ease, fun and games, so the litany goes. There is nothing wrong, of course, in the material amenities of our day. But to make their acquisition and enjoyment the end all of human existence is a folly ~~worth~~ worth avoiding like the plague. Too many people spend their lives on this narrow, inane track today and retire all too early to become vegetables.

To take a more serious approach to an answer, you might ask yourself, what are your values? I take it we might assume that these values are of a spiritual character, and that they represent what you really intend to live for and work for, or if need be, to suffer and die for. These values are what you must use to define the kind of person you wish to be, the kind of life you intend to live, the best hoped-for meaning of your life in the days ahead, however many or few they will be.

You must make up your own list, of course, for you must live your own life for your own goals. But I would like to suggest some of the enduring values that have made human existence worthwhile in every age, and that could make your life most meaningful in our times. Beyond that, these values also share the fine patina of eternity, for they have withstood the test of time. They have endured through every crisis that man has known.

First of all, commitment to truth in all its forms: the joy of ever seeking truth, the peace of finding truth everywhere, the courage of living truth always. Open-mindedness is the prelude to this commitment, intellectual honesty is its truest spirit, and purity of life is essential to both possession of the truth and commitment to what it demands of us.

Commitment to what is good and excellent. I mean here no narrowly selfish good, but that every good and noble inspiration might find in you a champion and a defender, and indeed a personification. What is good for your own moral integrity, yes, but also the realization that you will often find yourself and your ~~talent~~ good in spending yourself and your talent for the good of others who need you. To void the taint of intellectual and moral mediocrity, to be willing to stand for something, even something unpopular, if it is good; to be willing to be a minority of one if need be, this is part of the commitment. But not to be a neutral where principle is involved, a moral cipher, a pragmatic compromiser who easily takes on the protective coloration of whatever moral environment happens to be at hand. This is also ruled out by commitment. Is it too much to expect of you? Anything less ~~would~~ is all too little.

A passion for justice in our times. Again, not merely justice for yourself, or your family, or your profession, but especially a passion for justice as regards those who have few friends and fewer champions. There are great and festering injustices in our country and in our world. You can side step them if you wish, you can close your eyes and say it is none of your business. Then remember that freedom and equality of opportunity in our times are quite indivisible. If one class, or nation, or race of men is not really free, then the freedom of all men is endangered. Injustice

breeds more ~~much~~ injustice, disorder begets more disorder. You do not need a suit of armor, or a white horse, or a sword, but just a sensitivity to justice wherever it is endangered, a quiet passion to be concerned for justice in our times, a compassion for all men who suffer injustice, or the fruits of injustice.

Lastly, I would suggest a value that could have many names, but the simplest name of all is Faith. Faith is not an easy virtue for those who in their own profession instinctively take nothing on faith. But in the broader world of ~~man's~~ man's total voyage through time to eternity, faith is not only a gracious companion, but an essential guide. Faith begins with belief in God, He who is, the ultimate eternal Source of all else that is: all truth, all goodness, all beauty, all justice, all order. Science, as science, tells us nothing of this, nor does science deny any of this, unless you take seriously the prattling of Cosmonaut Titov about not seeing God while in orbit.

Faith I take it to be a gift of God, but one that is amenable to rational foundations and prayerful preparation. It is not just a blind leap into the dark on no evidence whatsoever. It is rather a luminous opening on another world that adds new personal dimensions to one's life and wider vistas to one's highest endeavors. For these reasons, I have added faith to my list of the values that make life more meaningful. A lifetime is not too long to cherish such values, nor is eternity too long to reward them.

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