

Session 5: The Way Forward: “Sufficient Proof”

Prior Reading

Having read an excerpt from Todd May’s A Significant Life, what stands out to you? Was there a particular line or idea, maybe even a key word for you? Was there a story that sticks with you? Was there something that gave you pause?

Excerpt from Todd May, *A Significant Life*

Quotes

Read through the following quotes, selecting a few of the ones that most appeal to you. Reflect on what they say to you and why you selected those particular quotes.

“That you have not yet died is not sufficient proof that you’re alive.”

-David Steindl-Rast

“The soul has an absolute, unforgiving need for regular excursions into enchantment. It requires them like the body needs food and the mind needs thought.”

-Thomas Moore

“Unbeing dead isn’t being alive.”

-e. e. cummings

“Imagine you’ve been flailing and flailing and expecting to drown and your foot hits bottom.”

-Thomas Wolfe

“How to die is a question of how to live, how to love, how to hope.”

-James K. A. Smith

“There are a thousand thousand reasons to live this life, everyone of them sufficient”

-Marilynne Robinson

“I’d like to be the sort of person who can enjoy things at the time, instead of having to go back in my head and enjoy them.”

-David Foster Wallace

“Do every act of your life as though it were the very last act of your life.”

-Marcus Aurelius

“To be sensual, I think, is to respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself, and to be *present* in all that one does, from the effort of loving to the breaking of bread.”

-James Baldwin

“Life is the gift. Not what we have, but that we are.”

-Diana Butler Bass

“People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth.”

-Thich Nhat Hanh

“Cynicism may seem a mild transgression, but it is a patient predator that suffocates hope, slowly, over many years.”

-Rachel Held Evans

“I’d never wish insomnia on anyone; I want people to have really good, healthy sleep. But at least when we’re awake, we should be insomniacs. When we’re awake, we should be awake.”

-Ariel Burger

“One life on this earth is all that we get, whether it is enough or not enough, and the obvious conclusion would seem to be that at the very least we are fools if we do not live it as fully and bravely and beautifully as we can.”

-Frederick Buechner

“Gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.”

-G. K. Chesterton

“If most people were to be born twice they'd improbably call it dying.”

-e. e. cummings

It is unimaginably hard to do this, to stay conscious and alive in the adult world day in and day out.”

-David Foster Wallace

“Scratch any cynic and you will find a disappointed idealist.”

-George Carlin

“Reality lies in the greatest enchantment you have ever experienced.”

-Hugo von Hofmannsthal

“Gratitude is the wine of the soul. Go on. Get drunk!”

-Rumi

“Like all dreamers I confuse disenchantment with truth”

-Jean Paul Sartre

“While there’s life, there is hope.”

-Stephen Hawking

“For all that has been—thanks. For all that shall be—yes.”

-Dag Hammarskjöld

"The greatest thing is to give thanks for everything. He who has learned this knows what it means to live. He has penetrated the whole mystery of life: giving thanks for everything."
-Albert Schweitzer

"I'm just afraid of having a tombstone that says HERE LIES A PROMISING OLD MAN."
-David Foster Wallace

"Life, for most people, simply isn't."
-e. e. cummings

"The internet rewarded all the parts of my personality that the tangible world didn't: sarcasm, cynicism, and a refusal to enjoy almost anything."
-Scaachi Koul

"Let gratitude be the pillow upon which you kneel to say your nightly prayer."
-Maya Angelou

"Every ounce of my cynicism is supported by historical precedent."
-Glen Cook

"Piglet noticed that even though he had a Very Small Heart, it could hold a rather large amount of Gratitude."
-A. A. Milne

"Why do we call all our generous ideas illusions, and the mean ones truths?"
-Edith Wharton

"Cynicism creates a numbness toward life."
-Paul E. Miller

"Life is the first gift, love is the second, and understanding the third."
-Marge Piercy

"Enough is revealed in the way you wait, and then in the way you leap."
-Jordan Kisner

"Heaven and earth are only three feet apart, but in the thin places that distance is even smaller."
-Celtic Proverb

"Absolute, unmitigated attention is prayer."
-Simone Weil

“The peculiar grace of a Shaker chair is due to the fact that it was made by someone capable of believing that an angel might come and sit on it.”

-Thomas Merton

“A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing.”

-Oscar Wilde

“It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child.”

-Pablo Picasso

“An ounce of practice is worth more than tons of preaching.”

-Mahatma Gandhi

“Rest and be thankful.”

-William Wordsworth

“I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’”

-Alasdair MacIntyre

“What matters in life is not what happens to you but what you remember and how you remember it.”

-Gabriel García Márquez

Questioning and Wrestling (Q and W)

The first list below names some of the larger questions we will wrestle with in our session. There are also questions posted from the reading we did in advance. Take a few moments to reflect on these in preparation for group discussion. The other questions listed will make more sense after the plenary session.

Living the Questions

What does it mean to live a life worth living? How do I decide my answer? What will we do with what we’ve encountered during these sessions? What does the good life look like in the day-to-day of our lives? Whether one believes in life after death, what should life before death look like? If some devout Muslims pray five times a day, what do you do many times in a day that shapes you? Are there certain habits, practices that can promote a life worth living?

Todd May Reading

In what ways has your past shaped your life at present (childhood experiences, schooling, occupation, choices made)? When you imagine a different way of being in the world, of changing, what comes to mind? What obstacles? What helps? How does inquiring about the meaningfulness of your life overall feel different from measuring it at different periods of your life? What difference do you think it makes to be asking these questions at this point in your life as opposed to earlier stages? If life is lived in

bits and pieces, yet best measured in terms of the whole, how would you describe the meaning of your life? What is your story? What is the story you tell others about your life? What is the story you tell yourself about your life? How do these versions shape you? If confined to the singular “meaning” of life, what would you say at this moment? If playing with the plural “meanings” of life, how might that feel different? How might that shape your answers differently?

The Last Four Weeks

When you look back over the previous four sessions, what stands out for you? One way to think of this is to imagine someone asking about the course, about the basic idea; what would you say in your case? Is there a reading, a quote, an idea that sticks with you? What is your reaction now to what you wrote up front in your inventory?

The Way Forward

Thinking about your eulogy, your legacy, what would you want to be said of the life you lived? How might you live into that legacy even more fully? What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “life before death”?

Adam Smith on “Our Great Purpose”

Given that we are torn between self-interest and others, between tranquility and fame, what would developing your “impartial spectator” look like? If others were to describe what makes your life meaningful, what might they say?

Thomas Moore on “Re-Enchantment”

Do you think we have need for “regular excursions into enchantment”? What do you make of the notion of falling out of love with life itself? How would you describe your love at present?

Charles Taylor on “Disenchantment”

How would you describe your frame of mind: enchanted and believing or disenchanted and doubting? Or does “cross-pressured” feel more accurate?

David Foster Wallace on “Drudgery”

When confronted with the drudgery of life (work, traffic, lines, exhaustion, etc.), what is your default mindset?

Practicing and Practices

How many times a day do you think you check your smartphone? What other practices shape your everyday life? Are there “tiny things” you might incorporate into the rhythm of your days that could renew you?

James K. A. Smith's You Are What You Love

What do you make of the idea that we are not always rational in our behaviors and practices? If we were to ponder what our hearts are drawn to, how might that change our habits?

12 Tiny Things

What new practices, habits do you intend to pursue? What obstacles can you envision that could hinder your new practice? What strategies might you enact?

Jonathan Sacks's Blank Page

In the book that tells the story of your family, what will the last page tell of your story? What will be the story of your life?

Contact Information/Registration

If you have feedback on the course, feel free to email me; and if you know of persons who would be interested in future offerings of this course, please pass along my contact information: mike.graves@cccckc.org.

Suggested Further Reading

If you decide to read more, here are some suggested titles.

Heidi Barr and Ellie Roscher, *12 Tiny Things: Simple Ways to Live a More Intentional Life*

Robert Bellah, et al, *Habits of the Heart*

Kathy Escobar, *Practicing: Changing Yourself to Change the World*

Thomas Moore, *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*

Jonathan Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times*

James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*