When All You’ve Ever Wanted Isn’t Enough
( Family Values )
By Win Green

When I knocked on some 400 doors and asked, “What is your idea of success?” overwhelmingly the answer had to do with family. I’m confident 95% of the answers nationwide would be family. Family is our number one priority.

But is the priority of family reflected in our calendars, day timers, and check books? Do we spend the bulk of our time, energy, and resources on our loved ones, or do we give them the left-overs? Are we living what we believe? We have good intentions; still too often we must soothe guilty consciences. We reason that by leaving for the office earlier in the morning, and by coming home more exhausted at night that we are providing for our families. But the pursuit of the pot of gold at the end of the career rainbow eventually swallows our families whole.

If I asked the average person what is more important to them, the approval of strangers or the affection of family, everyone would think the question stupid. But how often do we bring home a bad day at the office and vent our frustrations on our loved ones. How often do we diet and make life miserable for our family all so that we can look good for people we barely know. And how often do we squash the playful spontaneity of our children because we are embarrassed in front of strangers?

Recently, George Gallup took a national poll on stress in America. Surprisingly the number one cause of stress is not money, or having enough time, nor is it our relationships. No, the number one cause of stress today is what Gallup calls “incongruent values”... which means not living out what we believe. It’s when our walk doesn’t match our talk... when our deeds don’t match our creeds. For example, people may claim their number one value to be family, but did you know that the average father spends less than five minutes a day in direct contact with his children and about thirty five seconds with their infant children?

Saturday’s headline in the Sun Sentinel was about a Broward County judge who award a mother and her children 4.8 million in back payments from a dead beat Dad who had been hiding his money in the Caribbean. I’m sure that if we were to ask this man whether family was important value to him that he would say yes, but I think it’s safe to say that his deeds did not match his creeds. His life is one big incongruent value. The scripture says,

“A man who does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he is disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1 Tim. 5:8).
We say that family values are important, but too often don’t walk the talk, and this creates stress.

People claim health is their second highest value. But do they do the things they know will enhance their health: eat right, rest, exercise, and stop smoking? The scriptures says,

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you...?“ (1 Cor. 6:19)

Few would admit to being materialistic, but do they save, do they have credit card debt, do they live pay check to pay check? Incongruent values cause stress.

And how about God? People claim God is an important value, but do they make time for God, do they worship Him, do they invest their money in the things of God, do they volunteer their services for God’s work? Stress is caused by values in conflict... incongruent values, and the result is predictable... we are stressed out and not happy.

I.

If You Want To Be Happy, Discover Your Purpose

If I asked the average person what they wanted out of life. No doubt their answer would be “I want to be happy.” In America today we have a billion dollar industry devoted to making us happy. Entertainment is our country’s number one enterprise, yet happiness eludes most of us. Why is it with so many reasons to be happy that so many of us feel as though there is something missing?

A big answer is incongruent values. We work our hearts out and sacrifice our families upon the alter of success only to find out that success doesn’t satisfy. Too many of us have learned the hard way that our souls are not filled with possessions, position, and pleasure. Trying to satisfy the thirst of the soul with success is like trying to quench thirst with salt water... it will make us thirstier and sick. Success creates as many problems as it solves.

Oscar Wilde once observed that, “There are only two tragedies in life, one is not getting what you want, and the other is getting it.” A lot of us in the suburban jungle are getting what we thought we wanted only to discover that success by itself just doesn’t satisfy. John D. Rockefeller was once asked how much money is enough. He answered, “There’s never enough.”

While sitting in a conference room at a local office recently, I read a message that had been left on some newsprint from the previous business meeting. The message read, “Success is not the result of spontaneous combustion. You must set yourself on fire.” I’m afraid that for many of us this is precisely the
problem... many of us are setting ourselves on fire. We are burning up... consumed by our pursuit of success, and our families, marriages, and communities are going down in flames.

An article in the Sunday Sun Sentinel (2/9/97) noted that the average American now sleeps 1.5 hours less each night than at the beginning of the century, and claimed that the typical person is sleep-deprived. Too many of us are beginning to wonder what it is like to be fully awake!

The iron gate of Auschwitz, the Nazi concentration camp where millions died, had these words written above them, “Work Sets One Free”. It was a lie then, and it is still a lie. The scripture says that it is not work that set us free, but the truth, and the truth is that many of us are burning ourselves up with work... meaningless work.

Many of us are running hard after success, and we assume the blessings are somewhere ahead of us. We never consider that they are, in fact, right beside us, like a child waiting to climb up into our laps, a spouse sitting by our chair in the family room, a neighbor waiting for an invitation to share a meal.

Some of the books that are currently being published suggest that Americans are now looking for something deeper than success. Some of the titles are:

- The Success Trap
- Beyond Success
- Success Fantasy
- Is It Success Or Is It Addiction?
- Coping With the Fast Track.

The soul is made to be filled with specific things, one of which is purpose. For the soul to be satisfied, life has got to have purpose. We need to know our purpose in life. The scripture says,

“The Lord has made everything for its purpose.”
(Proverbs 16:4)

It is only when we know what that purpose is that our souls can find their significance.

Psychiatrists report that most patients nowadays arrive in their consulting rooms not with raw pain, but with a severe case of emptiness.

I was in the book store the other day and I noticed on the New York Times best seller list a book entitled, I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was. No wonder so many people are so frustrated. People are not even sure what they are supposed to be doing with their lives! No wonder so many people are frantically working, working, working... they are not only working to make a living, but they are also working to establish some sort of purpose for themselves.
To establish some sort of meaning to justify their existence. We could do anything if only we knew what it was! The scriptures says,

“Establish thou the work of our hands upon us.” (Psalm 90:17)

In other words, God has a purpose for us if only we are willing to open ourselves to it.

The meaning and purpose of life is a difficult question to answer, but it’s even more difficult to avoid. Eventually the question of what our lives mean will catch up to us. We can avoid it only so long. Sooner or later our soul will demand an answer. Inevitably we will drive to work and ask ourselves the question, ‘Is this all there is to life?’

As a pastor I have the privilege of spending time with people who are dying, and I can tell you that not all people die the same. Some die just as they lived... without any meaning or purpose. They die feeling as though they never really made a difference in life... as if they were only another drop of water floating into an endless sea... only to be forgotten. With so many people dying in such despair is it any wonder that people are living in despair... merely existing without meaning our purpose. They sleep, they eat, they work, but they never really live. They have nothing to live for and nothing to die for.

Some respond to the question “What is the meaning of life?” the great American way... with the answer ‘the pursuit of happiness’. Yes, our constitution guarantees us the right to pursue happiness. But this is only a political freedom; it is not an answer for a soul thirsty for meaning. A soul is not made happy by pursuing happiness. In fact, most of us are frustrated in our efforts to find happiness. But you don’t become happy by pursuing it. You become happy by living a life that means something.

Pursuing happiness is a lot like chasing a cat. The more you chase a cat the more it runs away from you. But if you let the cat alone and get on with your work, it will eventually climb up on your lap.

The happiest people you know are probably not the most successful, nor are they those who work hardest at being happy. The happiest people you know are those who clearly understand their purpose in life, and who devote themselves to others. They don’t work hard at being happy; instead they work hard at being helpful. They don’t concern themselves with being successful, but with being genuine. They don’t measure their lives against an idealized dream for what their lives should be, but are instead interested in making a real difference in the real world. These are people who feel as though their life means something... and that at death that they will not be forgotten.
II.
The Story of Nicodemus

In the New Testament there is a story about a very successful man named Nicodemus who came to the conclusion that success was not enough. Nicodemus had reached the pinnacle of power. He was a ruler of the Jews, a member of the Hebrew Supreme Court. Every morning a jet black stretch limousine picked him up at his mansion where he lived in luxury with his lovely wife. His home was in the most exclusive part of town. His children attended the finest private schools. His garage had a Porsche for him and a Mercedes for her. They entertained friends lavishly, and they made sure that all who worked for them were treated well. They gave generously to the poor, and were pillars of strength at their local synagogue. In short, Nicodemus and his wife had accomplished everything that he knew to be worthy of his efforts, but still it was not enough. For some inexplicable reason he still felt empty. He would lie awake at night and wonder what was missing. Why was it that he was still unsatisfied? What more was there to accomplish? He was successful; he was religious; He was good, and yet he was empty.

Just because you are successful does not mean that you are fulfilling your purpose in life. The success you now experience may not be the kind of success for which God made you.

John Scully was the CEO of the Pepsi Company in the late 70’s and early 80’s. He was considered by his peers to be the young hot shot executive of America. He was powerful and rich, and yet it was evidently not enough. About that time Steven Jobs came to Scully to inquire whether he would like to take a chance and leave Pepsi to take leadership at Apple Computers. Jobs clinched the deal by asking Scully, “Look John, what do you want to do with the rest of your life? Do you want to spend it selling sugar water, or do you want to help me change the world?” Evidently, Power and money was not enough for Scully, and he opted to move to Apple.

We all want a purpose in life. We want to make a difference... to change the world for the better. I don’t know what your purpose in life is, but I can assure you that it has something to do with what you value most... with your priorities and your passions.

III.
God Fills the Empty Spot

Many of us may lie awake at night wondering what is missing. We try to fill the emptiness with work, with pleasure, and even with goodness and religion, but the only thing that satisfies the emptiness is to awake spiritually through our own
personal relationship with the living God and discover our purpose in life. The empty part of our souls is waiting for the one thing that can fill them with life, and that is the person of God. Only God’s Spirit will fit into that empty spot. Only God’s Spirit will satisfy the deepest longings of our soul. Only God will be able to answer the question, “What is the purpose of my life?” with the kind of satisfaction that our restless spirits demand.

Too many of us are living in a world of grey. There is no color; there is no life, no purpose nor meaning. We are torn apart by incongruent values. Some of us began our careers wanting to change the world, but now all we want to do is to survive. Too many of us simply get up every morning, go to work, and come back home, only to do it all over again the next day... But our souls demand more of us than mere existence. They want to live with meaning and purpose. They want to count for something. They want to make a difference.

We can chase after success all we want to, but we will never rise above the words of Jesus, “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and looses his soul?”

IV. Aligning Your Purpose with Your Values

There is something you can do. Take an hour, to sit by you. Some might say, ‘but I can’t find the time!’ That’s precisely the point. You will never find the time. Time is taken not found for the important things of life. Make a list of the three most important things in your life. Write them down. It is important to write them down. It may be that your values are like the values of so many others... what I call the three F’s: Your Family, Faith and Friends. Whatever your three values are be sure to write them down. Next, I want you to get out your calendar, your day timer, and your check book to compare your values with how and where you are spending your time, energy, and money. See just how well they match up. Finally, spend some quiet time with God, and ask Him this, “God what do you want me to stop doing?” Now I know that this sounds like an odd question, but for most of us our problem is not what we are doing. The problem is that we are doing too much. What does God want you to stop doing. What does God want you to stop spending money on. What does God want you stop spending time on.