

Toronto Meaningful Living Group Meetings

Sunday, June 5, 2011; 3:00 – 5:00 PM

Brief summary of the first Meetup meeting – by Jessica

In attendance were: Melissa, Emily, Joyce, Jenny, Jessica, Simone, Catherine, Rob, Klairén, Ming, John, Lilian, and Paul. For Tuesday: Catherine, Bruce, Ruth, Frank, Teresa, Jennifer, Paul, Lilian

Announcements – Lilian

- These Meetup meetings are sponsored by The International Network on Personal Meaning (INPM; www.meaning.ca). We would appreciate it if you would become a member of INPM.
- A contact information signup sheet is available for those who would like to be contacted through emails, phone or mail.
- Announcements re: Meetup meetings: -
 - Two parallel meetings are scheduled every other week: Sunday at 3pm, & Tuesday at 7pm (the same materials will be covered). Jennifer has posted the dates on Meetup.
 - Exercises: There will be new exercises for each session to be completed in advance.
 - Certificates: Certificates will be awarded to members who demonstrate consistent attendance, commitment to learning, and contribution to the group.
 - Surprise: First 10 individuals with full attendance and completed exercises will receive a surprise.
 - Binders: To keep and organize the handouts, exercises, and reading materials, the group agreed that Lilian would purchase some binders for the groups.
 - Refreshments: If anyone would like to contribute refreshments for the meetings, please inform Lilian, Jennifer, or Jessica.
 - Free literature and information materials are on the foyer table. Help yourselves.
 - Handouts: Previous handouts are also available on the side table.
 - Request: If anyone has comments about the group, please share them on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Meaningful-Living-Project/162677933792689>.
 - Parking: Park on our own driveway, or on the street. If you park on the Tyndale parking lot, you need to pay.
- Confidentiality: Lilian reminded the participants that personal issues shared during Meetup meetings must be regarded as confidential.

LESSON ONE: We Live Only Once: How to Live Well and Make It Worthwhile, led by Dr. Paul Wong

- He opened the session by stating, “This is a group about life and wrestling with the big questions about human existence, such as: Is there a God? What is our ultimate meaning and purpose? Why is there suffering? How do I make sense of and what do I do with my own personal predicaments?”
- He raised five questions that we need to find answers to in order to live a meaningful life: How to get it right the first time, How to make the most of it, How to make the right choices, How to overcome all the obstacles, and How to achieve it.
- The gap between reality (“where I am now”) and our ideal (“where I want to be”) and the need to negotiate the tension between the two in order to keep moving forward, not becoming stagnant.
- The four possible life trajectories: an ordinary life (no risks, no major ups and downs), a tragic life (making life-ruining mistakes), a fortunate life (self-actualizing, starting and ending well, which is less common), and a heroic life (life disrupted, hitting bottom, and becoming stronger). He asked the question, “How we can ensure that we move upward in life instead of downward?”
- He pointed out that to be alive is to suffer from the basic ontological anxiety. If we choose the status quo and security, we will suffer from feelings of guilt (for not doing our best or developing our potential) and regrets (of opportunities lost because of fear), and if we choose change or ideal (being authentic, taking chances), we will experience fear of failure and uncertainty as we step into new territory.
- He then described the great disillusion and the great deception, explaining that some people believe that they know what would make them happy, and believe they will be happy “only if...” Paul referenced King Solomon’s conclusion that nothing can satisfy the human heart. He said if we look for happiness we will never find it, but if we look for meaning, happiness will come through the back door.
- He formulated an equation for maximizing the worth of life. He talked about how we can always do something right where we are at, and with what we have right now (instead of “waiting until...”). He also contrasted the broad (e.g., expediency, compromise, cheating) and narrow (e.g., ethical, honest) paths. When talking about resources, he posed the question of whether we need God to live a meaningful life, suggesting that He is a major resource – a hope and anchor for us in difficult times. He also talked about the importance of resilience in achieving our dreams, referencing Frankl (difficulty makes you stronger) and the Bible (difficulty builds character).

- He said the equation is a checklist that hopefully we would be able to answer each of the questions by the end of the course.

Discussion of the assigned exercise: Life Orientation Profile

Individual Profile Results were shared in casual discussion, and then Dr. Wong took us through the four different orientations, each highlighting a different primary concern. He shared that research shows the virtuous life and the meaningful life tend to go together, and the pleasant life and successful life also tend to be a pair. He said that our Life Orientation Profile affects the choices we make (e.g., doing the right thing even when it will cost you your job, choosing not to take a raise to avoid stress).

Lilian suggested that one's orientation could depend on one's stage in life which led into some discussion. Others commented on the "icons" item, and other items on the questionnaire (e.g., Lady Gaga daring to be different; not needing to be poor to be virtuous; power being useful, but the importance of not letting it corrupt you).

We concluded the meeting with a reminder of our next meeting time (the Sunday after next at 3pm).