

What's Wisdom? Resume or Eulogy Values? Matthew 2:1-12; Isaiah 60:1-6

We are at the end of another advent season. And the beginning of another year. So it's a good time to contemplate – what has drawn our attention this advent season? And what do we want to prioritize this coming year?

On one side of the sermon insert there are questions for you to contemplate this week. On the other side is space for sermon notes. And the sermon on the church web site has additional information if you are interested, along with where these resources were found. Also, you can ask for a hard copy. Please hear this sermon individually & as a congregation.

Our focus statement from our Advent guide for today is: Drawn by Jesus' light, we, like the magi, are sent forth in new directions. We are empowered to be God's illuminating presence in the world. Arise, shine, for the mystery of Christ has been revealed!

A few years ago, my attention was caught by David Brooks, who wrote: "It occurred to me that there were two sets of virtues, the **résumé virtues and the eulogy virtues**. The résumé virtues are the skills you bring to the market place. The eulogy virtues are the ones that are talked about at funerals, whether you were faithful, honest, kind or brave. Were you capable of deep love?"

"We all know that eulogy virtues are more important than the résumé ones. But our culture and our educational systems spend more time teaching the skills and strategies we need for career success than the qualities we need to radiate an inner light. Many of us are clearer on how to build an external career than on how to build inner character.

Brooks continues: "But if we live for external achievement, years pass and the deepest parts of us go unexplored and unstructured. We lack

a moral vocabulary. It is easy to slip into a self-satisfied moral mediocrity. We grade our selves on a forgiving curve. We figure as long as we are not obviously hurting anybody and people seem to like us, we must be O.K. But we live with an unconscious boredom, separated from the deepest meaning of life and the highest moral joys. Gradually, a humiliating gap opens between your actual self and your desired self, between us and those incandescent souls we sometimes meet."

Arianna Huffington, picks up this theme in a Huffington Post blog, "[Are you living your eulogy or your resume?](#)" Have you noticed when people die, their eulogies celebrate life very differently from the way we define success in our everyday existence? It's telling what you don't hear in eulogies.

For example: "He was proud that he never made it to one of his kid's Little League games because he always wanted to go over those figures one more time."

Or: "She didn't have any real friends, but she had 600 Facebook friends, and she dealt with every email in her inbox every night."

Arianna continues: "No matter how much a person spends his or her life burning the candle at both ends, chasing a toxic definition of success and generally missing out on life, the eulogy is always about the other stuff: what they gave, how they connected, how much they meant to the lives of the real people around them, small kindnesses, life long passions and what made them laugh. So the question is: Why do we spend so much time on what our eulogy is not going to be?"

"Eulogies aren't résumés," David Brooks wrote. "They describe the person's care, wisdom, truthfulness and courage. They describe the million little moral judgments that emanate from that inner region."

The imagery of light plays an important role in this Sunday's lectionary texts. In Matthew it is the star in the sky that draws everyone to the one who has been born king of the Jews. In Isaiah, it is the people of God who serve as the light that draws nations from near and far. The metaphor of light can be found throughout the Bible. Jesus is the light of the world. (John 1:4) Followers of Jesus are called to be a light lifted high to show others the way. (Mt. 5:15)

Through these uses, light is consistently both attractive and illuminating. Our resume and eulogy virtues are a kind of light for those around us. But I think we can agree that those character values, eulogy virtues are what give and point to genuine life, authentic light.

Bronnie Ware is an Australian nurse who spent several years working in palliative care. She recorded her observations into a book, **The Top Five Regrets of the Dying**. There was no mention of more sex, bungee jumps, or much about work.

Ware writes of the phenomenal clarity of vision that people gain at the end of their lives, and how we might learn from their wisdom. "When questioned about any regrets they had or anything they would do differently," she says, "common themes surfaced again and again." Here are the top 5 illuminations, regrets of the dying, as witnessed by Ware.

1. I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me. This was the most common regret.
2. I wish I hadn't worked so hard. This came from every male patient Ware nursed.
3. I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings. Many people suppressed their feelings in order to keep peace with others. As a result they settled for a mediocre existence.

4. I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends. Many had become so caught up in their own lives that they had let golden friendships slip by over the years.

5. I wish that I had let myself be happier. Many did not realize until the end that happiness is a choice.

We know this stuff. The contrast between resume and eulogy virtues resonates with me and I hope it does with you. We do need to develop our resume values. Learning to be good at these things gives us much joy and success in life. But too often it's at the expense of developing our character, our eulogy virtues and affects our fully living as a light and in the light of Jesus. It's hard to adjust our cultural, mental, busyness, family habits and pressures.

I hope tying together resume and eulogy virtues, along with our scriptures, and the theme of light, makes sense to you. Browsing through a variety of ideas for today, I came across the following 3 points that just jumped out at me. As I read them I said, that's what the wise men did. And it's the first Sunday in 2018, so some consideration of New Year's resolutions is also in order.

The article is titled, **The Top 3 Regrets of 95-Year-Olds and How They Help Us Get a Heart of Wisdom** by Kevin Halloran. The article begins with Psalm 90, verse 12, that goes, "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."

Experience is a good thing, but even better is to take to heart the experiences of others, so we have more fulfilled and have less painful lives. This is wisdom.

This sociological study aimed at doing just that. They asked 50 people over the age of 95 this important question: "If you could live your life again, what would you do differently?" The question was left open-

ended and a variety of answers poured in. As the results were analyzed, sociologists found something very surprising. Three answers constantly re-emerged and dominated the study's results. Please note how these responses intertwine with David Brooks and Bronnie Ware's observations, as well as the Biblical theme of light.

One answer was: **Reflect**. The Bible gives us many commands to reflect, remember and meditate on what God has done. Advent is full of people taking time to ponder, be filled with awe and worship - light. The Gospels go out of their way to tell us Jesus also time apart to pray and listen to God. But we tend to be so busy with our lives that we constantly are thinking of the needs and wants of the present instead of listening and learning and looking.

Making time for a reflective life, helps us learn from mistakes, give thanks to God for victories, and cultivates desires to live our remaining days with greater intentionality, purpose and faithfulness. Choosing to have purposeful relaxation time instead of busy entertainment slows us down to really listen to ourselves, the world and the Holy Spirit.

It's always amazed me that the wise men took the next step after studying the stars. Their study and learning helped them realize something was different in that star. They took up the Holy Spirit's prompting to follow it. They slowed down enough to listen & contemplate, so they could follow God's leading.

Their long journey offered them time to reflect and connect the dots of the star, God's messages to them and the wonder of a heavenly king. I hope we can amaze ourselves and others as we share the gift and value of reflecting. Making reflection a habit helps our witness and it builds up the character, eulogy virtues. Reflecting helps us decrease the regrets Bronnie discovered as she listened and worked with dying patients.

Another common and popular response was **Risk**. Too many people just do the safe and easy things in life and then wonder, is this all that life has? They are so focused on doing what's expected, being proper and pleasing people, that they miss out on being true to themselves, taking time for activities beyond work, expressing feelings, strengthening friendships, allowing themselves to catch joy, to be happier, and build up their character values, thus enhancing their eulogy virtues.

Plus following Jesus is risky business. We are asked to live a set of values that supersede the values around us. Often we can only see one step ahead on the narrow path. And each step is sometimes both a risk and a call to trust God by renouncing our own comfort. Each step is a risk but God's light leads us!

It's too easy to be fearful and over cautious and not step out and follow God's call – what ever that is, be it profession or choosing to live God's values. For example, I've always been caught by the incongruity of being elevated by some people as a missionary or pastor, but often the same people say, "I'm not going to let my children become a pastor or missionary because they would face congregational politics, need to make public moral stands, don't make enough money, live far away and so on. And I'm not going to become too involved in church."

While we should count the cost of risks we take, we would be fools not to also count the immeasurable gain we will receive from the rewards Christ promises. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a person to gain the whole world and forfeit their soul?" Mark 8:34-36

The magi are an example that a life without risk and sacrifice for the Lord will be a life lost, while a life full of doing 'risky' things for the Lord and the gospel's sake will save it. How many people thought they were fools for spending all the time and money to chase after a star? Did they make laughing stocks of themselves by worshipping a foreign baby, offering him expensive gifts, much less disobeying a vengeful king?

The only real risk is to not deny ourselves and lose our life because that is what leads to a lost life. Put the light of Christ and the gospel first in life and follow wherever He leads - it would be risky not to. Risking, not just to have more fun and joy and a bigger variety of experiences in life, is an important way of building eulogy values.

And the third answer to the question: If you could live your life again, what would you do differently?, that constantly re-emerged and dominated the study's results from those 95 year olds, was a Long Term Outlook. **What is our long term legacy and witness?** Have we just taken from the world for our benefit, or do we purposefully give back, build up others, teach / live eternal values, and try to leave the world a better place than we received? Do our decisions and actions all focus on immediate personal satisfaction or do we make choices based on values that develop our character, build others up, and enhance eulogy virtues?

The Christian long term outlook goes beyond 95 years to all of eternity. We are to store up our treasure not on earth, but in heaven. God values different things than what we humans naturally value. Jesus alone is the only One who can and will test our works and thoughts in light of eternity. We must not be like the rich fool of Luke (12:12-21) who lived for this present life by hoarding food in larger and larger barns. He laid up treasure for Himself but was not rich towards God and others, and paid the price. Being too earthly-minded will

forfeit our kingdom usefulness and choke out our faith (Mt 4:19). What do we leave behind? The wise men showed they were truly wise!

Paraphrasing Isaiah, he calls us to: Arise, shine; for your light has come. The glory of the LORD has risen upon you. His glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light. Then you shall see and be radiant. Your heart shall thrill and rejoice. You shall proclaim the praise of the LORD."

Both resume and eulogy virtues are needed for living well. But Biblical wisdom tells us the eulogy virtues we develop – lead us to be radiant lights for Jesus Christ.

Notice that the Christ light is not simply something that is internal or meant to be kept to ourselves. The magi encountered the Christ child and then heard a message from God to return to their home by a different route. Though we hear nothing of the magi after this story, we wonder how this experience affected their journey home and their lives and witness after they returned to the East. When we encounter Jesus, we too are sent in new directions, not simply as recipients of the light, but as bearers of God's illuminating presence in the world.

Our advent learnings and preparations for another year, should lead us to live our lives in a way that we will not regret in eternity. May we follow the light of God's star that revealed Jesus Christ by living for the eternal glory of the One who redeemed us. The Holy Bible promises us, "When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." (1 Peter 5:4) After all, we only have one go around. Let's make it count.

What's Wisdom? Resume or Eulogy Values? Matthew 2:1-12; Isaiah 60:1-6

We are at the end of another advent season. And the beginning of another year. So it's a good time to contemplate – what has drawn our attention this advent season? And what do we want to prioritize this coming year?

On one side of the sermon insert there are questions for you to contemplate this week. On the other side is space for sermon notes. And the sermon on the church web site has additional information if you are interested, along with where these resources were found. Also, you can ask for a hard copy.

Our focus statement from our Advent guide for today is: Drawn by Jesus' light, we, like the magi, are sent forth in new directions. We are empowered to be God's illuminating presence in the world. Arise, shine, for the mystery of Christ has been revealed!

A few years ago, my attention was caught by David Brooks, a newspaper columnist who is also on T.V. frequently. He wrote: "It occurred to me that there were two sets of virtues, the résumé virtues and the eulogy virtues. The résumé virtues are the skills you bring to the marketplace. The eulogy virtues are the ones that are talked about at funerals, whether you were faithful, honest, kind or brave. Were you capable of deep love?"

"We all know that eulogy virtues are more important than the résumé ones. But our culture and our educational systems spend more time teaching the skills and strategies we need for career success than the qualities we need to radiate an inner light. Many of us are clearer on how to build an external career than on how to build inner character.

Brooks continues: "But if we live for external achievement, years pass and the deepest parts of us go unexplored and unstructured. We lack

a moral vocabulary. It is easy to slip into a self-satisfied moral mediocrity. We grade our selves on a forgiving curve. We figure as long as we are not obviously hurting any body and people seem to like us, we must be O.K. But we live with an unconscious boredom, separated from the deepest meaning of life and the highest moral joys. Gradually, a humiliating gap opens between your actual self and your desired self, between us & those incandescent souls we sometimes meet."

Arianna Huffington, picks up this theme in a Huffington Post blog, "Are you living your eulogy or your resume?" Have you noticed when people die, their eulogies celebrate life very differently from the way we define success in our everyday existence? It's telling what you don't hear in eulogies.

"You almost never hear things like: "His crowning achievement was when he made senior vice president."

Or: "What everybody loved most about her was how she ate lunch at her desk. Daily."

Or: "He was proud that he never made it to one of his kid's Little League games because he always wanted to go over those figures one more time."

Or: "She didn't have any real friends, but she had 600 Facebook friends, and she dealt with every email in her inbox every night."

Or: "But he will live on, not in our hearts or memories, because we barely knew him, but in his PowerPoint slides, which were always meticulously prepared."

Arianna continues: "No matter how much a person spends his or her life burning the candle at both ends, chasing a toxic definition of success and generally missing out on life, the eulogy is always about the other stuff: what they gave, how they connected, how

much they meant to the lives of the real people around them, small kindnesses, life long passions and what made them laugh. So the question is: Why do we spend so much time on what our eulogy is not going to be?"

"Eulogies aren't résumés," David Brooks wrote. "They describe the person's care, wisdom, truthfulness and courage. They describe the million little moral judgments that emanate from that inner region."

(David Brooks Awakin.org and the book – The Road to Character)

The imagery of light plays an important role in this Sunday's lectionary texts. In Matthew it is the star in the sky that draws everyone to the one who have been born kind of the Jews. In Isaiah, it is the people of God who serve as the light that draws nations from near and far. The metaphor of light can be found throughout the Bible. Jesus is the light of the world. (John 1:4) Followers of Jesus are called to be a light lifted high so show others the way. (Mt. 5:15)

Through these uses, light is consistently both attractive & illuminating. Our resume and eulogy virtues are a kind of light for those around us. But I think we can agree that those character values, eulogy virtues are what give and point to genuine life, authentic light.

Bronnie Ware is an Australian nurse who spent several years working in palliative care, caring for patients in the last 12 weeks of their lives. She recorded their dying epiphanies in a blog called Inspiration and Chai, which gathered so much attention that she put her observations into a book, The Top Five Regrets of the Dying. There was no mention of more sex or bungee jumps.

Ware writes of the phenomenal clarity of vision that people gain at the end of their lives, and how we might learn from their wisdom. "When questioned about any regrets they had or anything they would do differently," she

says, "common themes surfaced again and again." Here are the top 5 regrets of the dying, as witnessed by Ware:

1. I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me. "This was the most common regret of all. When people realize that their life is almost over and look back clearly on it, it is easy to see how many dreams have gone unfulfilled. Most people had not honoured even a half of their dreams and had to die knowing that it was due to choices they had made, or not made. Health brings a freedom few realize, until they no longer have it."

2. I wish I hadn't worked so hard. "This came from every male patient that I nursed. They missed their children's youth and their partner's companionship. Women also spoke of this regret, but as most were from an older generation, many of the female patients had not been breadwinners. All the men I nursed deeply regretted spending so much of their lives on the treadmill of a work existence."

3. I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings. "Many people suppressed their feelings in order to keep peace with others. As a result, they settled for a mediocre existence and never became who they were truly capable of becoming. Many developed illnesses relating to the bitterness and resentment they carried as a result."

4. I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends. "Often they would not truly realize the full benefits of old friends until their dying weeks and it was not always possible to track them down. Many had become so caught up in their own lives that they had let golden friendships slip by over the years. There were many deep regrets about not giving friendships the time and effort that they deserved. Everyone misses their friends when they are dying."

5. I wish that I had let myself be happier.

"This is a surprisingly common one. Many did not realize until the end that happiness is a choice. They had stayed stuck in old habits and patterns. The so-called 'comfort' of familiarity overflowed into their emotions, as well as their physical lives. Fear of change had them pretending to others, and to their selves, that they were content, when deep within, they longed to laugh properly and have silliness in their life again."

(From a Guardian article)

We know this stuff. The contrast between resume and eulogy values resonates with me and I hope it does with you. We do need to develop our resume values. Learning to be good at these things gives us much joy and success in life. But too often it's at the expense of developing our character, our eulogy values. It's hard to adjust our mental, cultural, busyness, family habits & patterns.

By now I am sure you are wondering – what does this theme have to do with advent much less the wise men? Well, I hope this makes sense. I hope tying together resume and eulogy virtues, along with our scriptures, and the theme of light, makes sense to you. Browsing through a variety of ideas for today, I came across the following 3 points that just jumped out at me. As I read them I said, that's what the wise men did. And it's the first Sunday in 2018, so some consideration of New Year's resolutions is also in order.

The article is titled, [The Top 3 Regrets of 95-Year-Olds and How They Help Us Get a Heart of Wisdom](#) by Kevin Halloran. This comes from the web site, ChurchLeaders.com. The article begins with Psalm 90, verse 12, that goes, "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."

Experience is a good thing, but even better is to take to heart the experiences of others, so

we have more fulfilled and less painful lives. This is wisdom.

There was a sociological study done several years ago that aimed at doing just that. They asked 50 people over the age of 95 this important question: **"If you could live your life again, what would you do differently?"** The question was left open-ended and a variety of answers poured in. As the results were analyzed, sociologists found something very surprising. Three answers constantly re-emerged and dominated the study's results. Please note how these responses intertwine with David Brooks and Bronnie Ware's observations as well as the Biblical theme of light.

One answer was: Reflect. The Bible gives us many commands to reflect, remember and meditate on what God has done. Advent is full of people taking time to ponder, be filled with awe and worship. The Gospels go out of their way to tell us Jesus also time apart to pray and listen to God. But we tend to be so busy with our lives that we constantly are thinking of the needs and wants of the present instead of listening and learning and looking.

Making time for a reflective life, helps us learn from mistakes, give thanks to God for victories, and cultivates desires to live our remaining days with greater intentionality, purpose and faithfulness. Choosing to have purposeful relaxation time instead of busy entertainment slows us down to really listen to ourselves, the world and the Holy Spirit.

It's always amazed me that the wise men took the next step after studying the stars. Their study and learning helped them realize some thing was different in that star. And they took up the Holy Spirit's prompting to follow it. They slowed down enough to listen and contemplate.

Their long journey offered them time to reflect & connect the dots of the star, God's messages to them and the wonder of a heavenly king. I hope we can amaze ourselves and others as we share the gift and value of reflecting. Making reflection a habit helps our witness & it builds up the eulogy values. Reflecting helps us decrease the regrets Bronnie discovered as she listened and worked with dying patients.

Another common and popular response was Risk. Too many people just do the safe and easy things in life and then wonder, is this all that life has? They are so focused on doing what's expected, proper and pleasing people, that they miss out on being true to themselves, taking time for activities beyond work, expressing feelings, strengthening friendships, allowing themselves to be happier, to catch joy, and build up their character values, thus enhancing their eulogy virtues.

Plus following Jesus is risky business. We are asked to adapt and live a set of values that supersede the values around us. Often we can only see one step ahead on the narrow path, and each step is sometimes both a risk and a call to trust God by renouncing our own comfort. Each step is a risk!

It's too easy to be fearful and over cautious and not step out and follow God's call – whatever that is, be it profession or choosing to live God's values. For example, I've always been caught by the incongruity of being elevated by some people as a missionary or pastor, but often the same people say, "I'm not going to let my children become a pastor or missionary because they would face congregational politics, need to make public moral stands, don't make enough money, live far away and so on. And I'm not going to become too involved in church."

While we should count the cost of risks we take, we would be fools not to also count the immeasurable gain we will receive from the

rewards Christ promises. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a person to gain the whole world and forfeit their soul?" Mark 8:34-36

The magi are an example that a life without risk and sacrifice for the Lord will be a life lost, while a life full of doing 'risky' things for the Lord and the gospel's sake will save it. How many people thought they were fools for spending all the time and money to chase after a star? Were they making laughingstocks of them selves by worshipping a foreign baby, offering him expensive gifts, much less disobeying a vengeful king? The only real risk is to not deny ourselves and lose our life because that is what leads to a lost life. Put Christ and the gospel first in life and follow wherever He leads - it would be risky not to. Risking, not just to have more fun and joy and a bigger variety of experiences in life, is an important way of building eulogy values.

And the **third answer** to the question: If you could live your life again, what would you do differently?, that constantly re-emerged and dominated the study's results from those 95 year olds, was a **Long Term Outlook**. What is our long term legacy and witness? Have we just taken from the world for our benefit, or do we purposefully give back, build up others, teach eternal values, and try to leave the world a better place than we received? Do our decisions and actions all focus on immediate personal satisfaction or do we make choices based on values that develop our character, build others up, and eulogy virtues?

The Christian long term outlook goes beyond 95 years to all of eternity. We are to store up our treasure not on earth, but in heaven. God values different things than what we humans naturally value. Jesus alone is the only One

who can and will test our works and thoughts in light of eternity. We must not be like the rich fool of Luke 12:12-21 who lived for this present life by hoarding food in larger and larger barns. He laid up treasure for Himself but was not rich towards God and other, and paid the price. Being too earthly-minded will forfeit our kingdom usefulness and choke out our faith (M 4:19). What do we leave behind? The wise men showed they were truly wise!

Paraphrasing Isaiah for the purposes of this sermon, he calls us to: Arise, shine; for your light has come. The glory of the LORD has risen upon you. His glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light. Then you shall see and be radiant. Your heart shall thrill & rejoice. You shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.” Both resume & eulogy virtues are needed for living well. But I think Biblical wisdom tells us the eulogy virtues we develop – lead us to be radiant lights for Jesus Christ.

Paraphrasing Isaiah, he calls us to: Arise, shine; for your light has come. The glory of the LORD has risen upon you. His glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light. Then you shall see and be radiant. Your heart shall thrill and rejoice. You shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.” Both resume and eulogy virtues are needed for living well. But Biblical wisdom tells us the eulogy virtues we develop – lead us to be radiant lights for Jesus Christ.

Notice that the Christ light is not simply something that is internal or meant to be kept to ourselves. The magi encountered the Christ child and then heard a message from God to return to their home by a different route. Though we hear nothing of the magi after this story, we wonder how this experience affected their journey home and their lives after they returned to the East. When we encounter Jesus, we too are sent in new directions, not simply as recipients of the light, but as bearers of God’s illuminating presence in the world.

Our advent learnings and preparations for another year, should lead us to live our lives in a way that we will not regret in eternity. May we follow the light of God’s star that revealed Jesus Christ by living for the eternal glory of the One who redeemed us. The Holy Bible promises us, “When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” (1 Peter 5:4) After all, we only have one go around. Let’s make it count.

Drawn by Jesus' light, we, like the magi, are sent forth in new directions. We are empowered to be God's illuminating presence in the world. Arise, shine, for the mystery of Christ has been revealed!

Jesus – light - Isaiah

Incoming freshmen UCLA survey for a number of years.

In 1966, 86 percent of college freshmen said that developing a meaningful philosophy of life was essential or very important. Today, less than half say a meaningful philosophy of life is that important. University of Michigan studies suggest that today's students score about 40 percent lower in measures of empathy than students did 30 years ago.

I'm not sure if students really are less empathetic, or less interested in having meaning in their lives, but it has become more socially acceptable to present yourself that way.

How find meaning?

If not a why when things go bad, everything falls apart.

Fulfillment of our lives depends on how well we choose our commitments / covenants and live them out.

In age where we have a maximum of choice and a minimum of meaning.

How and why make choices.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Chose Jeremy bentham when we should have chosen victor frankel

Pleasure and pain vs meaning

Chose renee decart by should have chosen Augustin

Cognitive creatures vs emotional and longing creatures

Chose Thomas hobbs instead of martin buber

Invididuals vs encounter – relationship community

Result:

Have become individual - communitarian

Utilitarian vs moralistic and meaning

Cognitive vs emotional

Incoming freshmen UCLA survey for a number of years.

In 1966, 86 percent of college freshmen said that developing a meaningful philosophy of life was essential or very important. Today, less than half say a meaningful philosophy of life is that important. University of Michigan studies suggest that today's students score about 40 percent lower in measures of empathy than students did 30 years ago.

I'm not sure if students really are less empathetic, or less interested in having meaning in their lives, but it has become more socially acceptable to present yourself that way.

The Visit of the Wise Men

Matthew 2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men^[a] from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising,^[b] and have come to pay him homage." ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah^[c] was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd^[d] my people Israel."

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men^[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me

word so that I may also go and pay him homage." ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising,^[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped,^[g] they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The Escape to Egypt

Luke 2:22-40 Jesus Is Presented in the Temple

²² When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; ^[a] this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and

the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.^[b] ²⁷Guided by the Spirit, Simeon^[c] came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸Simeon^[d] took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹"Master, now you are dismissing your servant^[e] in peace,

according to your word;

³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

³³And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon^[f] blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶There was also a prophet, Anna^[g] the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the

child^[h] to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

The Ingathering of the Dispersed

60 Arise, shine; for your light has come,

and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

²For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.

³Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

⁴Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you;

your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

⁵Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice,^[a] because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,

the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

⁶A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah;

all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

Ephesians 3:1-12^{New}

Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Paul's Ministry to the Gentiles

3 This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for^[a] Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— ²for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, ³and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, ⁴a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵In former generations this mystery^[b] was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. ⁸Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹and to make everyone see^[c] what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in^[d] God who created all things; ¹⁰so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was in

accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.^[e]

here was no mention of more sex or bungee jumps. A palliative nurse who has counselled the dying in their last days has revealed the most common regrets we have at the end of our lives. And among the top, from men in particular, is 'I wish I hadn't worked so hard'.

Bronnie Ware is an Australian nurse who spent several years working in palliative care, caring for patients in the last 12 weeks of their lives. She recorded their dying epiphanies in a blog called [Inspiration and Chai](#), which gathered so much attention that she put her observations into a book called [The Top Five Regrets of the Dying](#).

Ware writes of the phenomenal clarity of vision that people gain at the end of their lives, and how we might learn from their wisdom. "When questioned about any regrets they had or anything they would

do differently," she says, "common themes surfaced again and again."

Here are the top five regrets of the dying, as witnessed by Ware:

1. I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.

"This was the most common regret of all. When people realise that their life is almost over and look back clearly on it, it is easy to see how many dreams have gone unfulfilled. Most people had not honoured even a half of their dreams and had to die knowing that it was due to choices they had made, or not made. Health brings a freedom very few realise, until they no longer have it."

2. I wish I hadn't worked so hard.

"This came from every male patient that I nursed. They missed their children's youth and their partner's companionship. Women also spoke of this regret, but as most were from an older generation, many of the female patients had not been breadwinners. All of the men I nursed deeply regretted spending so much of their lives on the treadmill of a work existence."

Advertisement

3. I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.

"Many people suppressed their feelings in order to keep peace with others. As a result, they settled for a mediocre existence and never became who they were truly capable of becoming. Many developed illnesses relating to the

bitterness and resentment they carried as a result."

4. I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.

"Often they would not truly realise the full benefits of old friends until their dying weeks and it was not always possible to track them down. Many had become so caught up in their own lives that they had let golden friendships slip by over the years. There were many deep regrets about not giving friendships the time and effort that they deserved. Everyone misses their friends when they are dying."

5. I wish that I had let myself be happier.

"This is a surprisingly common one. Many did not realise until the end that happiness is a choice. They had stayed stuck in old patterns and habits. The so-called 'comfort' of familiarity overflowed into their emotions, as well as their physical lives. Fear of change had them pretending to others, and to their selves, that they were content, when deep within, they longed to laugh properly and have silliness in their life again."

What's your greatest regret so far, and what will you set out to achieve or change before you die?

Since you're here ...

... we have a small favour to ask. More people are reading the Guardian than ever but advertising revenues across the media are falling fast. And unlike many news organisations, we haven't put up a paywall – we want to keep our journalism as open as we can. So you can

see why we need to ask for your help. The Guardian's independent, investigative journalism takes a lot of time, money and hard work to produce. But we do it because we believe our perspective matters – because it might well be your perspective, too.

I appreciate there not being a paywall: it is more democratic for the media to be available for all and not a commodity to be purchased by a few. I'm happy to make a contribution so others with less means still have access to information. Thomasine F-R.

Adam I Vs. Adam II

“Adam I is the career-oriented, ambitious side of our nature. Adam I is the external, resume Adam. Adam I wants to build, create, produce, and discover things. He wants to have high status and win victories. Adam II want to embody certain moral qualities. Adam II want to have a serene inner character, a quite but solid sense of right and wrong — not only to do good, but to be good. Adam II wants to love intimately, to sacrifice self in the service of others, to live in obedience to some transcendent truth, to have a cohesive soul that honors creation and one's own possibilities.

While Adam I want to conquer the world, Adam II wants to obey a calling to serve the world. While Adam I is creative and savors his own accomplishments, Adam II sometimes renounces worldly success and status for the sake of some sacred purpose. While Adam I asks how things work, Adam II ask why things exist, and what ultimately we are here for. While Adam I want to venture forth, Adam II wants to return to his roots and savor the warmth of a family meal. While Adam I's motto is 'success,' Adam II experiences life as a moral drama. His motto is 'Charity, love, and redemption' (pp. xi, xii).

“Adam I — the creating, building, and discovering Adam — lives by a straightforward utilitarian logic. It's the logic of economics. Input leads to output. Effort leads to reward. Practice makes perfect. Pursue self-interest. Maximize your utility. Impress the world.

Adam II lives by an inverse logic. It's a moral logic, not an economic one. You have to give to receive. You have to surrender to something outside yourself to gain strength within yourself. You have to conquer your desire to get what you crave. Success leads to the greatest failure, which is pride. Failure leads to the greatest success, which is humility and learning. In order to fulfill yourself, you have to forget yourself. In order to find yourself, you have to lose yourself.

To nurture you Adam I career, it makes sense to cultivate your strengths. To nurture you Adam II moral core, it is necessary to confront your weaknesses” (p. xii).

Modern Life

“We live in a culture that nurtures Adam I, the external Adam, and neglects Adam II. We live in a society that encourages us to think about how to have a great career but leaves many of us inarticulate about how to cultivate the inner life. The competition to succeed and win admiration is so fierce that it becomes all-consuming. The consumer marketplace encourages us to live by a utilitarian calculus, to satisfy our desires and lose sight of the moral stakes involved in everyday decisions. The noise of fast and shallow communications makes it harder to hear the quieter sounds that emanate from the depths. We live in a culture that teaches us to promote and advertise ourselves and to master the skills required for success, but that gives little encouragement to humility, sympathy, and honest self-confrontation, which are necessary for building character” (p. xiii).

“The central fallacy of modern life is the belief that accomplishments of the Adam I realm can produce deep satisfaction. That's false. Adam I's desires are infinite and always leap out ahead of whatever has just been achieved. Only Adam II can experience deep satisfaction. Adam I aims for happiness, but Adam II knows that happiness is insufficient. The ultimate joys are moral joys” (p. 15).

Vocation vs. Career

“Today, commencement speakers tell graduates to follow their passion, to trust their feelings, to reflect and find their purpose in life. The assumption...is that when you are figuring out how to lead your life, the most important answers are found deep inside yourself....You should ask certain questions: What is the purpose of my life? What do I want from life? What are the things that I truly value, that are not done just to please or impress the people around me?” By this way of thinking life can be organized like a business plan....But [she who was called] found her purpose in life using a different method....*In this*

method, you don't ask, What do I want from life? You ask a different set of questions: What does life want from me? What are my circumstances calling me to do? In this scheme of things we don't create our lives; we are summoned by life. The important answers are not found inside, the our found outside. This perspective begins not within the autonomous self, but with the circumstances in which you happen to be embedded. This perspective begins with an awareness that the world existed long before you and will last long after you, and that in the brief span of your life you have been by fate, by history, by chance, by evolution, or by God into a specific place with specific problems or needs. Your job is to figure certain things out: What does this environment need in order to be made whole? What is it that needs repair? What tasks are lying around waiting to be performed?" (pp. 21, 22).

"Few people are put in circumstances that horrific and extreme [as Viktor Frankl in concentration camps during WWII], but all of us are given gifts, aptitudes, capacities, talents, and traits that we did not strictly earn And all of us are put in circumstances that call out for action, whether they involve poverty, suffering, the needs of a family, or the opportunity to communicate some message. These circumstances give us the great chance to justify our gifts" (p. 24).

"A vocation is not a career. A person choosing a career look for job opportunities and room for advancement. A person choosing a career is looking for something that will provide financial and psychological benefits. If your job or career isn't working for you, you choose another one. A person does not choose a vocation. A vocation is a calling. People generally feel they have no choice in the matter. Their life would be unrecognizable unless they pursued this line of activity" (p. 24).

"A person with a vocation is not devoted to civil rights, or curing a disease, or writing a great novel, or running a humane company because it meets some cost-benefit analysis. Such people submit to their vocations for reasons deeper and higher than utility and they cling to them all the more fiercely the more difficulties arise" (p. 25).

"She [Frances Perkins]...reflected on a distinction that had once seemed unimportant to her. When a person give a poor man shoes, does he do it for the poor man or for God? He should do it for God, she decided. The poor will often be ungrateful, and you will lose heart if you rely on immediate emotional rewards for your work. But if you do it for God, you will never grow discouraged. A person with a deep vocation is not dependent on constant positive reinforcement. The job doesn't have to pay off every month, or every year. The person thus called is performing a task

because it is intrinsically good, not for what it produces" (p. 44).

"The essential drama in life is the drama to construct character, which is an engraved set of disciplined habits, a settled disposition to do good. The cultivation of Adam II was seen as a necessary foundation for Adam I to flourish"(p. 53).

Knowledge Vs. Education

"Knowledge is not enough for tranquility and goodness, because it doesn't contain the motivation to be good. Only love compels action. We don't become better because we acquire new information. We become better because we acquire better loves. We don't become what we know" (p. 211).

"Education is a process of love formation. When you go to school, it should offer you new things to love" (p. 211).

"He [Augustine] started with the belief that he could control his own life. He had to renounce that, to sink down into a posture of openness and surrender. Then, after that retreat, he was open enough to receive grace, to feel gratitude and rise upward. This is life with an advance-retreat-advance shape. Life, death, and resurrection. Moving down to dependence to gain immeasurable height" (p. 211).

Road to Character ("The Humility Code")

1. "We don't live for happiness, we live for holiness" (p. 262)
2. However we have an "innate tendency toward selfishness and overconfidence." We tend to see ourselves as "the center of the universe" (p. 262).
3. Even though we are flawed, we are "splendidly endowed." We do sin, but we "also recognize our capacity for sin" (p. 262).
4. Humility – having an accurate assessment of our own nature and our place in the cosmos – is our "greatest virtue" (pp. 262, 263).
5. Thus "pride is the central vice" because "it blinds us into thinking we are better than we are" – our abilities and moral weaknesses (p. 263).
6. "The struggle against sin and for virtue is the central drama in life" (p. 263).
7. Character is the result of "inner confrontation." It is "a set of dispositions, desires, and habits" that are slowly developed through a "thousand small acts of self-control" (pp. 263, 264).
8. What leads us astray are short term things: "lust, fear, vanity, gluttony." The dimensions of

character, in contrast, are long-term in nature: courage, honesty, humility” (p. 264).

9. No one can achieve mastery of the virtues alone (p. 264).
10. “We are all ultimately saved by grace. The struggle against weakness often has a U shape....The shape is advance-retreat-advance” (p. 265).
11. “Defeating weakness often means quieting the self” (p. 265).
12. Wisdom begins with knowing our limitations (p. 265).
13. The good life is not possible “unless it is organized around a vocation....Vocation is found by looking without and asking what life is asking us. What problem is addressed by an activity you intrinsically enjoy?” (p. 266).
14. “The goal of leadership is to find a just balance between competing values and competing goals” (p.266).
15. “The person who successfully struggles against weakness and sin may or may not become rich and famous, but that person will become mature....A mature person possesses a settled unity of purpose” (p. 267).

1. If I could do it all over again, **I would reflect more.**

16. 2. If I could do it all over again, **I would risk more.**

17. 3. If I could do it all over again, **I would do more things that would live on after I am dead.**¹

18. It is striking that these three thoughts (or really regrets) were common among the group—which is to say that we will probably feel the same way if we live to 95. When I’m 95, I don’t want to look back with regret. I want to look back in thankful victory of what God did in me and through me and give praise to His Name for my life.

19. I’m not sure that study had any ties to Christianity, but I do know that each of the answers are right in line with what Scripture has said all along. Here are a

few thoughts on this study relating to the Christian faith:

20. *Reflect*

21. Scripture gives us many commands to reflect, remember and meditate on what God has done (for starters, see Deuteronomy 8 and Psalm 1). We are often so busy with our lives that we constantly are thinking of the needs of the present instead of learning from the lessons of the past.

22. Snap out of that habit. Live a reflective life that learns from mistakes, gives thanks to God for victories, and cultivates desires to live your remaining days with greater intentionality and purpose. One practical way I reflect is by journaling about experiences and relationships and then praying over them that God would teach me what He wants to from them. As the years go by (and assuming I keep up with that discipline!), I can look back at all the Lord has taught me along the way.

23. *Risk*

24. Being a Christian is risky business. I sometimes feel like I can only see one step ahead of me on the narrow path, and that each step is both a risk and a call to trust God by renouncing my own comfort. Each step is a risk!

25. While we should count the cost of risks we take, we would be fools not to also count the immeasurable gain we will receive from the rewards Christ

promises. The passage below makes it clear that a life without risk and sacrifice for the Lord will be a life lost, while a life full of doing ‘risky’ things for the Lord and the gospel’s sake will save it. **The only real risk is to not deny yourself and lose your life because that is what leads to a lost life. Put Christ and the gospel first in your life and follow wherever He leads you—it would be risky not to.**

26. *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?”** Mark 8:34-36*

27. Long-Term Outlook

28. The Christian long-term outlook goes beyond 95 years to all of eternity. We are to store up our treasure not on earth, but in heaven. God values different things than what humans naturally value. He alone is the only One who can (and will) test our works and thoughts in light of eternity. Don’t be like the rich fool of Luke 12:12-21 who lived for this present life by hoarding food in larger and larger barns. He laid up treasure for Himself but was not rich towards God—and paid the price.

29. Do you live more for the cares of this present life or for the life to come?

Being too earthly-minded will forfeit your kingdom usefulness and choke out your faith (Mark 4:19). Don’t live your life in a way that you will regret in eternity—give Christ your all and live for the eternal glory of the One who redeemed you.

30. *“And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” 1 Peter 5:4*

31.