

## Meaning Psalm 19

### The Dance with Death

During this Lenten season, we've been practicing Visio Divina together. Today, let's take a moment to do it together. Take a look at the image on the screen. [PPT] This is The Dance with Death, painted by Johann Rudolf Feyerabend. If you look closely, you'll see that death spares no one—young or old, king or nun, knight or commoner. It's a powerful reminder that no matter who we are, death is a reality we all must face.

It's undeniable. No matter how advanced medicine becomes, one thing has never changed: "The mortality rate has remained constant—one per person." Death and illness are part of being human. Yet, here's the paradox: when we fully accept our mortality, we begin to live more fully. Recognizing that our time is limited doesn't lead to despair—it leads to deeper gratitude, greater purpose, and a life that is truly meaningful.

Dr. Warren Ward, a psychiatrist and professor, experienced this firsthand. He was diagnosed with melanoma, an aggressive and often fatal form of cancer. As a doctor, he knew exactly what that meant—how quickly it could spread, how deadly it could be. He underwent surgery, and thankfully, it seemed to be successful. But while medicine may have healed his body, something deeper happened—his perspective on life changed. He said: "I became aware, in a way I never had before, that I was going to die—if not from melanoma, then from something else, eventually." That realization didn't bring fear—it brought clarity. He didn't want to reach the end of his life filled with regret, wishing he had lived more fully, more authentically. He wrote, "As a doctor, I am reminded of the fragility of the human body. As a psychiatrist, I see how empty life can be without a sense of meaning or purpose. An awareness of our mortality, of our precious finitude, can, paradoxically, move us to seek—and if necessary, create—the meaning we so desperately crave."<sup>1</sup>

### The Meaning of Life

On Ash Wednesday, we heard these words again: "From dust you came, and to dust you shall return." When we come to terms with our own finiteness, we begin to live more fully in the present. And to live fully, we need meaning. As Dr. Ward put it, when we lose sight of meaning, we feel empty, restless, as if something is missing. Without meaning, life feels hollow. So, let me ask you: Are you living a meaningful life? That's a big question, isn't it? It's broad, deep, and hard to answer. And honestly, there isn't just one right answer—because the source of meaning is different for everyone.

Back in 2018, the Pew Research Center conducted a study titled "Where Americans Find Meaning in Life." 69% said family. 23% said career, followed closely by 22% who answered "money." 20% found meaning in faith, and 19% in friendships. That study was done seven years ago, so things may have changed. But what stood out to me was this: More people found meaning in money than in faith or friendships. Maybe that's not surprising in a capitalist, materialistic society. Many look to wealth and possessions to define their sense of purpose and meaning. But just because something feels natural doesn't mean it's right.

Jesus teaches: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up treasures in heaven." And how do we store up treasure in heaven? Not by accumulating—but by giving and sharing. Proverbs 19:17 says: "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward

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<sup>1</sup> <https://aeon.co/ideas/sooner-or-later-we-all-face-death-will-a-sense-of-meaning-help-us>

them for what they have done.” What we do for the least of these, we do for the Lord. It’s not about possessions—it’s about relationships. People come before money.

In *To Have or To Be?*, philosopher Erich Fromm describes two ways of living: A life of having, where meaning comes from what we own. A life of being, where meaning comes from who we are. He warns that when we confuse what we own with who we are, we set ourselves up for fear and emptiness. If we believe, “I am what I have,” then the moment our wealth or possessions disappear, our sense of purpose crumbles. Fromm puts it this way: “Those who live to have are always afraid of losing. But those who live to be grow richer by sharing their true selves.” So, let me ask: Where do you find meaning in your life?

If you’re not sure, think about this: What do you pray for most earnestly? What do you long for from God? Where do you spend your time, energy, and resources? If your answer is wealth, status, or possessions—things that won’t last—then maybe it’s time to step back. Lent is a season of reflection, a time to turn our eyes away from what fades and back to the One who never changes.

### **Finding Meaning in Every Season of Life**

Many of you have already learned, through your long life journeys, that seeking meaning in wealth and possessions doesn’t truly satisfy. But on the other hand, some of you may be thinking: “My body isn’t what it used to be. There’s not much I can do anymore. I don’t have much time left—what meaningful thing could I possibly do now?” This is exactly when we need to seek meaning the most.

Victor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor and author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*, spent years in a Nazi concentration camp, enduring suffering beyond imagination. And through that experience, he came to this powerful truth: “The search for meaning is the very essence of human existence.” But here’s the key—Quote, “For the meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person’s life at a given moment.” That means no matter how old we are, no matter what struggles we face, we can still find meaning—and we must. Frankl also discovered something else: those who find meaning can endure even the greatest hardships. And one of the places we discover meaning? By deeply encountering something or someone. A conversation, a connection, a simple act of love—even in the smallest moments, meaning is waiting to be found.

The author of today’s Psalm finds meaning and wisdom in the awe of God’s creation: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” (Psalm 19:1-4) Creation proclaims God’s truth without words. We don’t just hear its message—we experience it, feel it, and discover it with our whole being.

I wasn’t born yet, but many of you may remember the historic moment in 1968 when Apollo 8 reached the moon for the first time. Would you take a look at this image? [PPT] This is the famous “Earthrise” photograph. As Apollo 8 orbited the moon, astronaut Bill Anders looked out the window and saw something no human had ever seen before—Earth rising over the lunar horizon. Quickly, he grabbed his camera and captured what would become one of the most iconic images in history: Earthrise. Later, Anders described that moment as a profound experience of humility: “We set out to explore the moon, but we ended up discovering the Earth.” That moment changed him. The sight of Earth—small, fragile, yet breathtaking—stayed

with him. Even after leaving NASA, he devoted himself to environmental advocacy. His photo became a symbol of global unity, inspiring movements like the first Earth Day in 1970 and shaping environmental policies around the world. Through this deep encounter with Earth, Bill Anders discovered something greater than he had ever expected. Sometimes, meaning isn't something we figure out—it's something we encounter.

Meaning isn't just found in nature. We can also discover meaning through the people we meet every day. When we slow down, pay attention, and look deeply, we begin to see the goodness in others. We recognize the image of God in them—and in that moment, we may discover new meaning.

Last week, some of our church members participated in the Supporting Our Immigrant and Trans Members and Neighbors, as well as Women's Health – Training, and Deb Rose shared about it during the announcements. Why did you go? I believe those who attended that meeting may find meaning in encountering the suffering of immigrants and marginalized groups at this pivotal moment in history.

As an immigrant, I was deeply moved and comforted to see Asbury Church members standing with marginalized immigrants and LGBTQI+ people. I know how much it means to witness people willing to stand in solidarity. It is a source of comfort and strength to know that we are not alone. Instead of turning away because the issue didn't directly affect you, you chose to stand with the vulnerable. And that kind of love, that kind of courage, reminds me—there is still hope in this dark time.

And this also means, no matter your age or circumstances, you have the power to bring meaning to someone else. A simple word of encouragement. A small act of kindness. A hand reaching out in solidarity. Sometimes, in the face of overwhelming injustice, these efforts can feel insignificant and meaningless.

But they are not. Every seed of love we plant is never wasted. God does not let them go unnoticed. A few years ago, I heard that a college student in Korea was looking for Juhee. When Juhee and I served a small church in Korea, she gave free violin lessons for about a year to the daughter of a pastor. We knew how hard ministry life could be, and Juhee had once received kindness from others when learning the violin herself. So, without hesitation, she passed on that generosity and taught the girl until we left for the U.S.

For over ten years, there was no contact. Then, one day, out of the blue, this student reached out. She hadn't just continued playing—she had gone on to study violin at Ewha Womans University, one of Korea's top schools. She was now in graduate school, teaching students of her own. She told Juhee that back in 7th grade, she had been unsure whether she should continue playing. But Juhee's lessons and encouraging words had given her the confidence to pursue her path. And now? She is giving free violin lessons to students who cannot afford them—just as she once received.

Yes. The small acts of kindness we offer are never meaningless. It might take ten years, fifteen years before we see the fruit of what we have sown. But God will make it grow. So don't ever think that the love you give today is too small to matter. You are already bringing meaning to someone else's life.

Now, take a moment to reflect: March 2025. This very moment. How can I live a meaningful life? May you trust in God's guidance and live a life filled with purpose, love, and meaning. Amen.