



*solutions that transform*

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# Gleanings

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## The Secret of Life

Have you asked, “What is the secret of life?”

I asked my fitness trainer, who interacts with a wide variety of people, how he thought people might answer. He gave me an assortment of possible responses, such as, happiness, family, fun, money, fame, influence, long life, and even a bottle of Guinness.

The question *What is the secret of life?* is too vexing for many people, so they dismiss it as an unsolvable conundrum. But there are at least three people who believe they have the answer. This trio is so confident that in their book they included a section titled “The Secret of Life.”

What book would be so bold as to offer a nontrivial answer to this question? Porras, Emery, and Thompson’s *Success Built to Last*—a sequel to the book, *Built to Last*, which examined the keys to enduring organizational success. Continuing some of the same themes, *Success Built to Last* examines the factors that contribute to enduring personal success.

The book is based on personal interviews with two hundred people ranging in age from forty to ninety-five, each of whom has enjoyed personal success for at least two decades. Personal success is defined using typical metrics, such as, fortune, fame, and influence.

In the course of presenting their findings, the authors stated that the secret of life is really quite simple—it is *serving people by doing what you have a passion to do*.

Serving people is not a new concept. It is the foundation of good customer service or, as some say, “customer care.” The idea of serving people is captured in the term *servant leaders*—a buzzword that conjures up pictures of humble selfless leaders. Jim Collins, in his book *Good to Great*, calls these leaders “level 5 leaders.” Such leaders put the interest of others ahead of their own—a truly challenging task, particularly in today’s narcissistic environment. But according to the authors of *Success Built to Last*, your search for meaning and purpose in life can lead to only one answer—serving others by doing what you have a passion to do.

To facilitate an understanding of what this means, allow me to define *serve* and *passion*. *Serve* means “to meet the licit needs of others.” *Passion* is “anything that a person has an intense desire to do.” So serving others by doing what you

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have a passion to do is simply meeting the needs of others by doing what you have an intense desire to do.

Since we are created beings, a person's passions, unimpaired by sin, must be created as well. If God is both strategic and intentional about how He creates, then a person's passions are precisely what he or she needs to accomplish his or her divinely ordained purpose. It follows then that the greatest need of any created being is to discover the Creator and then to discover the Creator's reason for creating that person.

This implies that at the most fundamental level the secret of life is to serve others by using our divinely ordained passions to help others discover their divinely ordained life purposes.

Applying this to *family life* means that the greatest way parents can serve their children is to help them discover their life purpose.

Applying this to *church life* means that the greatest way church leaders can serve their church members is to help them discover their life purpose.

Applying this to *community life* means that the greatest way that government officials can serve citizens is to help them discover their life purpose.

Applying this to *work life* means that the greatest way that managers and business owners can serve their workers is to help them discover their life purpose.

This may seem too ethereal, after all, if your passion is, for example, something like selling or accounting or computers or automobile repair, then how do these activities help others find their life purposes? Quite simply, if you are doing what God created you to do, then you are modeling for others how to fulfill their life purposes. And modeling is a powerful tool for serving others.

Hence, the secret of life is to serve others by helping each of them discover their life purpose. One of the greatest venues for this activity is the workplace. This makes work a holy calling. It means whatever work you are passionate about, as long as it is licit, is important. And because God placed your passion in your heart, you will only find peace, joy, and contentment doing what God created you to do. And in the process you will serve others by modeling for them how to find the secret of life.

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