

Week 48: The Good Life vs. the Redemptive Life

The film Jerry Maguire infused pop culture with a number of phrases that have stood the test of time, like “Show me the money!” and “You complete me.” But beneath the sports story and the love story, another story was playing out. The film opens with a sports agent in the midst of an identity crisis. In a moment of inspiration, he pens a manifesto—a mission statement—for the future of sports agency. He calls for fewer clients, less money, a life of sincerity and passion. He titles it, “The Things We Think and Do Not Say.”

And it’s a total disaster.

By the end of the week he has no job, one client, an alienated fiancée, and only his loneliness to keep him company. As he walks through the devastation of his life, several scenes find him muttering, “It was just a mission statement.” I loved that movie. I saw it five times in the theater. Why? I think as a twenty-year-old, trying to find his footing in life, I was desperately needing to be reminded that you don’t find a life purpose by searching for a life purpose. Purpose arises from fidelity to a passion.

Purpose arises when we walk the hard path our passion is leading us down.

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In these days, the hearts of people are filled with a deep, yet vague, sense of longing. In an age of instant recognition, overwhelming connectivity, and startling wealth, we find ourselves with an aching hollow inside of us. And everyone has an idea about how to fix it, but the solutions are like bailing water on the Titanic—the ship is sinking and the band plays on. And we all know it, and we’re all frustrated and scared, and so many of us are wondering, “What’s *wrong* with me? Why doesn’t the advice work for *me*?”

The solutions don’t work because they are always focused on finding the good life.

The so-called good life is a hollow promise. It’s empty of the things we desire most, like passion, purpose, and peace. If we watched a movie about a person who lived the good life—raised in wealth, protected from hardship, inheriting the family business, retiring early and becoming a great shuffleboard champion—we would not come alive inside. We would be bored. Restless. We would want more. We would be craving something else. We would be craving a story about *redemption*.

Likewise, what we ultimately crave is a redemptive *life*.

The redemptive life, like any good story, always begins with brokenness and pain. In our favorite stories, the character we love begins broken and haunted and full of demons. We ache for the character to overcome his demons. This is what the best stories give us: demons silenced, brokenness mended, pain redeemed. To live a satisfying life, we must first feel our pain.

The redemptive life, like any good story, always contains a moment of confrontation. A moment in which the character we love stops running from the slobbering beast-of-pain at his heels, turns around, stares deep into its eyes, and sometimes even *grows back*. This is the moment when a redemptive life really begins. And this is also the birthplace of peace. Because peace is not the absence of pain. Peace is the deeply held confidence that all of our pain can be faced.

The redemptive life, like any good story, always transforms the pain into something beautiful. And the moment of transformation is also the conception of purpose: a sense of purpose hums within us when we face the pain of our story and realize the transformation of it will be the direction of our life.

Here's the problem with the redemptive life, though: our hearts cannot yearn for both the redemptive life *and* the good life. The desires for each cannot coexist in our souls. I know. I tried. I remember the day when I turned to my wife and, voice cracking, stepped into all the pain I thought would annihilate me and said, "My whole life has been one long lonely scramble for perfection." One continuous search for the good life.

I remember the months that followed, facing the isolation of my shame—my deep-in-the-bones sense of not being good enough. And I remember how my heart began to rupture, as a desire for comfort and ease gave way to another desire—a yearning to walk through the world with open arms, leaving cashiers and waitresses and customer service representatives and friends and a wife and children feeling overwhelmed by grace and marked by a sense of belovedness. I found this pain called shame at the center of me, and the redemption of it became my purpose.

What pain have you discovered inside of you? If you are longing for a purpose to your life, the redeeming of that pain is not a bad place to start. In what small way can you begin to redeem it? How will you, eventually, apply your passion to the redemption of your pain and find purpose in the mingling? How will your creativity transform your pain into something beautiful?

You may find yourself today at a fork in the road. Down one path lies the good life. And down the other lies the redemptive life. I know which path I want to walk. Want to go for a stroll with me?