

Desperate for Jihad

If we don't fill our own lives with purpose and meaning, someone else will come along and do it for us. At the core of our being is an essential need to experience an exciting mission in our lives. All of us want to lead a life with clarity and joyful abandon. Living life in neutral, or even first or second gear, is a drag. We all want to make that shift into a higher gear, but only if we know where we are going! Jesus said, "Come follow me." He assured his followers that the greatest abundance or purpose in life can be found in doing the Father's will. God has a particular assignment or mission for each one of us to do battle against the forces of evil in this world. But if we say no to that invitation, we leave ourselves wide open to saying yes to something else that is often harmful and destructive to our souls.

The great American 19th century writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau, was spot on when he wrote; "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with that song still in them. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation." Quiet desperation is not a good thing. It can easily lead to fear and anxiety, anger or depression. Too often we become incredibly angry with ourselves because we have not found what we are looking for, or discovered what we are supposed to do with our lives. And, nine times out of ten, we attack others and blame them for our own quiet desperation. That is one of the reasons so many people are dying these days on the streets of American cities, victims of gang warfare. Gangs have become very good at recruiting people who are living lives of quiet desperation, filled with unmet needs.



Henry David Thoreau

Tragically in recent years, gang behavior has gone international. On everyone's minds and hearts these days is the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS, also called ISIL. They have taken gang organizational management and recruitment techniques to new heights. The leaders of ISIS are Internet savvy, YouTube friendly, and cunning in their promotional materials. Hundreds of British and American youth, not to mention thousands of Arab youth, have recently deserted their home countries and joined forces with ISIS. These young men believe the recruiting messages our intelligence officials say ISIS uses: "Jihad will give you meaning and purpose in life. It will drive away your depression." ISIS has recognized and is exploiting the core of the human experience, just as Thoreau had identified and predicted. ISIS knows, too, that the human soul is desperate for

meaning and purpose in life. If that need for meaning is not filled with the grace and the love of our Lord, the risks are great that that unmet need will be filled with something else, often extremely violent, dangerous and lethal.

This summer, I met with wonderful, grace-filled Christian workers from churches in Minneapolis. They had asked that I advise them on how to approach Muslims in their community. They wanted to learn the way of Jesus, the path of peace, so as to gain the trust of local mosques and local Muslim communities. Minneapolis has a large number of Somali and Ethiopian immigrants, many of whom are being recruited daily by militant Muslim groups from abroad. They have discovered it is not just African immigrants who have become the target of ISIS recruiting efforts; it is also disenfranchised young Americans from many different backgrounds. For these and other reasons, my friends in Minneapolis are trying to build bridges of friendship with their Muslim neighbors as quickly as they can to share the peaceful way of Jesus, before it is too late.



Minneapolis, MN

Can you imagine the level of desperation in one's soul if you found yourself becoming a suicide bomber in Pakistan, a killer of innocent children in an elementary school in Connecticut, or a murderer that would behead children in Syria? What happens to someone if killing others is the only way to find radical meaning and purpose in life? If we are not careful, if we do not take seriously the depravity of the human soul apart from our loving God, we will find these bloody tragedies becoming everyday common occurrences in our modern world.

ISIS is not the only destructive recruiter in our world. Our American landscape is filled with other equally dangerous messages of promoting obsessions of wealth, self-sufficiency and destructive chemicals that come in many different shapes and colors - all designed to be cheap substitutes for God's unique calling in your life.

On the other hand, the Apostle Paul modeled for us what it looks like for a human being to be fully engaged in God's purposes and calling. When we turn to God, if it is done with a sincere and seeking heart, and ask him what purpose he has for our lives, God will answer in a most loving and helpful manner. Paul was filled with vitality, wisdom, grace and effectiveness in all his endeavors. Miracles sprang from him because of his utter devotion to God's calling in his life. Almost single-handily, he laid the foundation of Christianity in what is now called the



Apostle Paul and his
disciple Timothy

western world. Paul never wavered in his calling even to the point of being unjustly put to death by the Roman Empire. Listen to what Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy just months before his death: "As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

To be a follower of Jesus is to believe in his return. When Jesus ascended to heaven, he left us plenty of work to do before he comes back again. He told us to go to the ends of the earth with his message of grace and love. He warned us that we would find many people living lives of quiet desperation, many who might even want to harm us. But he also assured us that his kingdom of peace and grace would have the final word and victory. The only issue would be our willingness to follow him, or not.

It is not too late if you believe a life that is fully alive and filled with purpose has eluded you. All of us flirt with quiet desperation. But none of us need to say yes to desperation as a way of life. Military jihad or harmful aggression against innocent people is not the answer to our quiet desperation or depression, as too many people are proclaiming today. Saying yes to a loving God, joining his army of love and grace, will give you more purpose and clarity than your soul ever imagined. Follow Him, and He will lead you to a life of peace and fulfillment.