

On the Meaning of Life

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It will give me pleasure to try to answer your question, for I see that it is put with full sincerity. The question is of prime importance and yet such as the majority of men do not put to themselves, assuming that there is no answer to it, or that it was given long ago, or that it is impossible; but it is a simple and necessary question, without which, it seems, it is impossible to live. You ask: What is the aim of human life? Why does man live, or, in different words, why do I live?

You are right when you say that it is only religion that answers this question. Religion, true religion, is nothing but an answer to this question; and the religion which I profess, the Christian teaching in its true sense, gives to this question an answer which is as simple and as clear as the question itself, if in the place of the word *aim* we put the word *meaning*.

The aim, the finite aim of human life in the world, which is infinite in space and time, is obviously not accessible to man in his limitation; but the meaning of human life, that is, why he lives and what he ought to do, must by all means be comprehensible to man, just as comprehensible as is to a workman his duty in a large factory.

The meaning of human life, as intelligible to man, consists in establishing the kingdom of God upon earth, that is, in cooperating with the substitution for the selfish, hateful, aggressive, irrational structure of life of another, which is amicable, fraternal, free, and rational.

The means for attaining this, that is, the answer to the question as to what a man must do, consists in what, according to the Gospel, forms the whole law and the prophets: to act toward others, as thou wouldst that they should act toward thee.

The answer, as you see, is very simple, but seems very obscure to us, because our animal nature, and our education, and the false religious teaching, accustom us to the belief that the meaning of life does not consist in serving God and our neighbour, but lies in our personal happiness. Having become accustomed to live for ourselves and our personal happiness alone, it seems hard to us to transfer the aim of our life to the service of God. But, no matter how hard it is, it is possible, and the more we accustom ourselves to it, the more natural it becomes, the more so since, by executing God's will, we by that very act attain the highest personal good, which before we regarded as the aim of our life, as it says in the Gospel, Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and the rest shall be added unto you. Living a personal life, we seek the rest only, that is, the personal happiness, and we do not attain it, and do not contribute to the establishment

of the kingdom of God, but, on the contrary, work against it. But seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness, we receive the rest, that is, happiness, if only by happiness we understand, not some external benefits for which we hanker, but spiritual ones, — peace, freedom, and joy.

I write to you, not what I have arrived at through reasoning, but what I have attained through experience: it is possible to live for the execution of God's will. If a man cannot live so at all times, he can do so in some of his best moments. If he shall find in it the meaning of life, he will live so ever more frequently. And the oftener he will live so, the more he will experience the reasonableness and joy of such a life and will be naturally drawn toward such a life.

The aim of life? There is no such aim, and there cannot be, and no knowledge can discover it. The law of direction, the path of life? Yes. To this, religion — wisdom, if you wish — gives an answer. Its answer consists in this, that it shows the falseness of all those paths which do not coincide with the one true way. By the rejection of the false directions it indicates and illuminates the one true direction. On this path a few little things can be seen. There are nearer aims which science points out, but it can in no way indicate the path.

In my weakness, in my incomplete subjection of my whole life to reason, I have put this question to myself, and have tried to answer it. If I were completely welded with the life of reason and lived in harmony with the law of the world, I should not think of it. But, without ascribing any importance to them, I must say that these are dreams that involuntarily pass through my head.

This is what has presented itself to me: the law of organic life is a struggle; the law of the rational, conscious life is union, love. On the organic life, the life of struggle, the rational life is born, and is connected with it. The aim is obvious: to destroy the struggle and introduce union where there was dissension: at first among men, then between men and animals, and then between animals and plants.

Such an aim has been put long ago. The Hebrew Messiah is nothing else: to forge spears into ploughshares, and let the lamb lie with the lions.

Now, it is an aim like this that flashes through my mind, but I ascribe no importance to it: I know that it is far from exhausting everything. What is dear to me is only the correctness of the direction of the path. The first condition for the correctness of the path, I know, is to walk on it with all my being.

The support and multiplication of life cannot be the aim of life, — so much is certain. But here there turn up two different points of view: one is this, that the knowledge in man — science in humanity — guides life, and that, therefore, the aim of life, as guided by knowledge, must be known to this knowledge; and the other, that man is a tool of reason for the accomplishment of the work of reason, which is not fully known to man, and that the aim of reason cannot be known, but what is known to man is only the path, the direction, in which reason living in man takes him. (Christ has said all this, and I never stop wondering at the logicalness and precision of his philosophic definitions.)

Indeed, can there be an aim for the life of the world and for the life of men (when they weld their life with the life of the world?) The concept of aim is a concept of the limitation of human reason, like the concept of reward and punishment, and so it is not applicable to the life of the world. If there is an aim, it must be attained, and then there is an end. For the world in general there can only be life: for the participants in the life of the world there is and can be only a direction, a path.

Besides: with the first point of view it is assumed that man's whole activity consists, or, at least, is guided by knowledge, and that for the attainment of the aim a mental activity is needed in the main (some think, exclusively). With the second point of view, a man, who knows the direction only, walks in this direction with all his nerves, and muscles, and nails, that is, he completely submits to the direction, which alone he knows, and with every step he sees new sign-posts on the road, but never the aim, which he can never see.

And only under this condition can man believe implicitly in the direction in which he is walking, and fulfil what reason demands of him. Only by placing himself under conditions of a support and a multiplication of life, which are in accord with reason, and only by having from the start chosen the one true direction of the path, — the path, — with all his being, can he with absolute certainty proceed and recognize himself in accord and union with reason; the nearer these conditions are, the safer; the farther, the more they are doubtful.

Not to see the promised land into which you have led others, or, at least, have been in some way instrumental in leading others, is the invariable law of your true life. The more actual the work of the true life is, the more remote are its consequences, and the consequences of a true life are not only remote, but at infinity, and so you cannot see them. You see farther than what your term of life is. You will see the house when it is built, and you will live to receive the rank of general; but you will not live to see the liberation, not only from the slavery of state, not even from the slavery of land tenure.

The most obvious proof that life is not in the attainment of the aim, but in the fulfilment of the message.

I have come to understand with a special, new force that my life and that of all is only a ministration, and has not purpose in itself.

Every life is meaningless, except the one which has for its aim the service of God, the service of the accomplishment of the work of God, which is incomprehensible to us.

It is a very common error to assume the aim of life to be in serving men, and not in serving God. Only by serving God, that is, doing what he wants us to do, can we be assured that we are not doing anything worthless, and it is not impossible to choose whom to serve.

God has given us his spirit, love, reason, that we may serve him; but we use this spirit in order to serve ourselves: we use the axe to whittle a handle with it.

The meaning of our life, the only, rational, and joyful meaning, consists in serving and feeling ourselves as serving the work of God, the establishment of his kingdom. At times it happens that you do not feel this service: it seems as though you had slipped off the collar, or the traces had given way; but at times it only seems so, because you got used to the collar and to the work, and no longer feel it. In any case, even if you do not externally feel your service, as long as you know in the depth of your soul that you have not refused to serve and have not slipped off your collar, you may be sure that you are serving: apparently you are having down-hill work, or the master wants to give you a breathing-spell.

The meaning of life now for me lies exclusively in serving God, saving man from sin and suffering.

But what is terrible is that I want to guess the road on which God wants to do it, and I may err and be overhasty, and so, instead of cooperating, may interfere and retard.

There is one means for avoiding errors, and that is, not to undertake anything, but wait for God's call, — which is a situation when a man cannot help acting this way or that, for God, or against him; in these cases all the forces are to be strained so as to do the first.

Man uses his reason for asking, What for? and Why? applying his questions to his own life and to that of the world; but reason shows him that there are no answers. With these questions one gets something like nausea and dizziness. The Hindoos say in reply to the question, Why? "Maya enticed Brahma, who existed in himself, to create the world;" but to the question, What for? they do not even invent such a stupid answer. No religion has invented, nor any human mind can invent, answers to these questions.

What does this mean? Namely, this, that human reason is not given for the purpose of answering these questions, — that the very putting of these questions indicates an aberration of reason. Reason solves only the fundamental question, How? And, in order to know how, it solves the questions, Why? and What for? within the limits of finality.

What how? How to live. How live? Blessedly.

That is necessary for everything living and for me. This possibility is given to everything living and to me. and this solution excludes the questions, Why? and What for?

But why and for what is blessedness not dissolved at once? Again an error of reasoning. Blessedness is the *doing* of blessedness: there is no other.

A live man is he who walks ahead toward where there is the light of a moving lantern, and who never reaches the end of the illuminated place, for the illuminated place is ahead of him. This is life, — there is no other; and only with such life is there no death, for the lantern illuminates *thither*, and thither you follow it as calmly as during the whole period of life.

But if man shields the lantern or begins to shed light around him or behind him, and not in front of him, and stops walking, there will be an arrest of life.

But if there is no meaning in my life, there is also none in the life of man and in that of humanity. Thus speak the ancient Buddhists and the modern pessimists. The same says the Gospel, but with this difference, that the Buddhists and pessimists say it as the last deduction, from which follows the negation of life; but Christianity says this as an indication of the false comprehension of life as held by the Gentiles, and of the necessity for another comprehension, the Christian, and of the confirmation of life.

Life has no aim which is comprehensible to man, so also says Christianity. But, though it has no comprehensible aim, it still has one, and man's vocation consists in serving this incomprehensible aim. An aim which is comprehensible to man would be a finite aim; but the aim which is now set before man is infinite, and the meaning of man's life consists in approaching it. The aim which is comprehensible only in infinity, as set before man, is incomprehensible to him, but the direction toward its goal is comprehensible.

"How can one live without knowing what will be, without knowing in what forms one will live?"

The real life begins only when you do not know what will be. Only then you create life and fulfil God's will. *He* knows. Only such an activity serves as a testimony of a belief in God and his law. Only then there is freedom and life.

We must be in relation to God's will, like a good thoroughbred little mare that I used to drive: she did not want to run away, or to stop serving me, but only wanted to guess what work I wished her to do. She tried now one leg, now another, now a third, now to the right, now to the left, now raising her head, and now dropping it.

Even so we must do.

For me Christ's teaching became most comprehensible and most- fully took possession of me, when I saw clearly that my life was not mine, but his who gave it to me, and that the aim of life

was not in me, but in his will, and that it was necessary to find it and to do it. This transformed me.

If God would only free us from the evil one, from the devil, who is the ego in me and you. If only I shall not forget that my life is not for tomorrow, not for the ensuing year, not in Yásnaya Polyana, not in Moscow, not with X nor without her, but in serving the Father everywhere, always, and with all men, and all is well. . . .

This is what we ought to be like, as Lao-tse says, — like water. If there are no obstacles, it flows; if there is a dam, it stops; if the dam breaks through, it flows again; in a square vessel it is square; in a round vessel it is round. For this reason it is most needful and strong.

The force with which we are convinced of something is full, complete, imperturbable, not when the proofs are logically incontrovertible, nor when the feeling coincides with the demands of reason, but only when man has become convinced through experience, having tried the opposite, that there is but one path.

Such conviction is given us as to life's being but this: the following of God's will.

Imagine that a beloved woman has promised you a rendezvous in the evening. How are you going to pass the day? How will you prepare yourself for this meeting? How afraid you will be that you will die, that the world will come to an end before the meeting! If only the meeting takes place! After that let come what may.

This is what desiring means. It is in this way that I should like to wish to do God's will, and just as passionately to wish for this alone, — its fulfilment. Is this possible?

Is this possible? Yes, it is. All that is needed for this is to know just as clearly what it is about and to be conscious of one's labour, and that there has to be a sacrifice.

God aid you to rejoice without cessation that nobody can anywhere or at any time interfere with you, — to rejoice at the fulfilment of his will, so long as you fulfil it in purity, humility, and love.

You ask: "Why live, how live, and what shall I do, in order to have a right to live?" First of all we must transpose the questions, and answer the question as to how we must live, and then only we shall try to comprehend why. We must live. We have lived before all reflection: every day we sleep, eat several times, move, think. We are all like a horse in a treadmill, the wheel of which is moving below us, compelling us to move. We cannot help but live, and so the first and chief question, in my opinion the only rational question, is as to how we shall live. We all, and you, too, know the first answer: in the best manner possible. Thus all men have lived, that is, while striving after it; thus they live and will live.

The second question: What means are best? In what way best? The answer is clear for a man who knows himself only: as many enjoyments as possible. But as soon as a man understands that he is not alone and feels the sufferings of others, the first answer no longer satisfies him, — there appears a contradiction between the personal striving after enjoyments and his conscience. You are in precisely this contradiction. In order to solve it, you must abandon yourself to one of these two forces, — to the striving after the personal good, or to your conscience, — and abandon yourself without any provision, exception, or compromise.

To abandon yourself to the striving after personal happiness or to your conscience does not mean that you are to drown the voice of your conscience or of your personal happiness, but that in your consciousness you recognize only one of the two as life, as the true life. Sufferings, doubts, are due to the indecision of the question in the consciousness. If it were so that your demands of truth are not the demands of your conscience, but something impressed upon you externally,

you would, by renouncing conscience, calm yourself and live and enjoy life, as long as you could. (Of course, it will end in suffering, I know. But you cannot take this on trust, if the demands of conscience have not yet wakened in you. But they will awaken, because the movement of all humanity is from the striving after the personal good to the demands of conscience. All this I say only as a very improbable possibility.) But if conscience is awakened in you, you must recognize once and for all that life consists only in the gratification of the demands of this conscience, and you will again be calm, and life will receive a meaning for you. For what is conscience? Conscience is that highest law of everything living, which every man recognizes in himself not only by the admission of the rights of everything living, but also by the love for it. The demands of conscience are what in Christian language is called God's will, and so the meaning of life and the answer to the two questions, "Why must we live and how must we act in order that we may have a right to live?" consists in doing God's will, which is cognized in our consciousness. To what will this bring you? I do not know; but I know that the clear consciousness of this will change your whole external life and will give your life a constant, more and more clear, joyful, and rational meaning. But if it is not clear to you what conscience demands, you will find an answer for it in the Gospel.

In order that I may answer your question, "What shall we live for?" you must first of all renounce all worldly considerations, all questions as to what studies are to be taken, or as to what may be agreeable or disagreeable for you or my parents, and vividly present to yourself the situation of a lonely, separate human being, which has lately, twenty or thirty years ago, appeared from somewhere, and to-day or to-morrow, in ten, twenty, or thirty years, must disappear somewhere.

Why should it be necessary for such a being to live, and for millions and billions of such beings, who are all in precisely the same condition? Obviously all this is not made for these beings, even as all the screws, wheels, and pegs of a large engine are not made for them, but in order to serve the common purpose of the engine.

The same is true of us: we are the instruments of that highest will, which through us does its necessary work. The only difference is that we recognize ourselves as living, and are able, if we do not admit that we are the tools of the highest will, to suffer from our situation, or, by recognizing ourselves as the necessary tools of life, to feel the joy of the participation in an infinitely great work, which is accomplished by the life of the world.

But you will ask wherein this work consists? To this I will reply that we cannot know all of it, but may always know when we cooperate with it, or when we work counter to it. Love relations to everything living, — first of all, of course, toward men, toward the nearest of them, — the sensation of love and the rousing of the same sentiment in others is a sign of the participation in the general work; the rousing of enmity and hatred in oneself and in others is a sign of counteraction to the general work.

Your letter has not only interested me, — it has drawn me toward you.

I think that you are seeking what every young man ought to seek, and what men cannot live without, although the whole life among the higher, well-to-do classes has formed itself in such a way as to make it possible for men to live without it. What you seek and toward what you are drawn, earlier than is the case with other men, by your nature, which is more serious than that of the majority of men, is the clearly cognized meaning of your life: What do I live for? Certainly not in order to procreate, send into the world, and educate just such people as I am, who. do

not know what they live for; and certainly not in order to make arch geological investigations, which are of very doubtful utility to men.

We can live without anything, except an answer to this question. In the meantime it is considered in our quasicultured world not only as a sign of a certain mental superiority not to know this, but even to assert that it is impossible to know this.

It is only religion which will give an answer to this question. If that religion in which you believed is destroyed by your critical relation toward it, immediately look for another, that is, for another answer to the question as to what you live for. Just as you cannot be for a moment without a king, as they say, *Le roi est mort, vive le roi*, so one can much less be for a moment without this king in the head and the heart. Nothing but religion, that is, an answer to the question, What do I live for? will give you that which will make it possible for you to forget yourself, your insignificant, perishable, satiated, and intolerably exacting personality.

I have written of nothing but this in my books which are prohibited in Russia. If you read them, you will find in them the answer which I have found for myself. But if you have not read my books or, having read them, have not found that answer, I can tell it to you in three words:

I live in order to do the will of him who sent me into life. But the will of God is this, that I should carry my soul to the highest degree of perfection in love, and that in this way I should cooperate in the unification of all men and of all beings in the world.

Everybody decides this in his own way, and the truth about the sword and division remains none the less a truth for all, no matter how you may decide it. I want to tell you this much, — what I have learned by experience, — what you are to be guided by in similar circumstances, — in the crush of life, when one gets into it and feels that there is one, only one path, and that it will be bad if one does not get on that path. This is what I think:

It is not given to us to know the will of the Father, what it consists in, what he "wants, why he has been doing all this (if I may express myself so from old habit and for the sake of illustration), what the aim of your life and of mine is; and when we imagine that we know the aim of the Father, we get entangled in a most cruel manner. We cannot know his purpose, if for no other reason than because it is infinite.

But we know, and we can always know, whether we are doing his will, — what we live for, what he wants of us. He holds us as by reins, and we, as a horse, do not know whither we shall come and why; but we know by the pain, when we are not going where we ought to, and by the freedom and absence of restraint that we are going right. And so we know by experience and with our whole being that the first, chief, and only (the rest being embraced by it) sign of the fulfilment of God's will is this, that we feel at ease and not pained, and even joyous. He, loving us, wanted that of us, and we know that it is necessary.

The second sign, but in dependence on the first, is this, that others should have no pain, that my activity may not call forth a groan of suffering. Now, here is the problem: one, as it were, excludes the other. But "as it were" ! When this seems so, it is a sign that life takes place in the crush, that there is not much of a path and it is of indifferent breadth, that the true path is narrow, as narrow as the point of a knife, but it exists. Feeling the sufferings of others as one's own, as you do, one can and must find that path which makes one feel at ease. That will be when I have done everything which depends on me in order to alleviate the sufferings of others. There exists, there exists that path, dear friend. You must pray, that is, commune with God, and this path will be found. The harder this search is, the more joyful it is. Yes, man must be free and almighty, and there is that one direction along which he is free and almighty, and it can be found.

But there is also a third sign, which I have found for myself. This is not a diminution, but an increase of the S' >'il. This sign is dear to me in that it verifies the choice. If an act, a manner of life, a path, takes away or diminishes the soul, it is not the right one. I cannot say that this sign can be taken as a guide, — God forbid,— but to use all my forces in the search of a path between the sufferings of others caused by me and the oppression which I experience, and to lay out this path for myself, it is possible to verify its correctness by means of this sign.

The true food of life consists in doing the will of him who has sent us hither and in completing his work. But the will of him who sent us and his work is this, that, in (he first place, we should pay the tribute for the life given to us with good deeds; and good deeds are those which increase love in men; and his work is to increase the talent, to add to the talent, our soul, which is given to us. And the one cannot be done without the other. It is impossible to do good deeds, which increase love, without increasing the talent, one's soul, without increasing love in it; and it is impossible to increase one's talent, to increase the love in one's soul, without doing good to people, by increasing love in them. Thus, one depends on the other, and one verifies the other. If you do a deed which you consider good, but do not feel an increase of love in your soul, if there is no joy at this in your soul, know that the deed which you do is not good. And if you do something for your soul, and the good is therewith not increased in men, know that what you are doing for your soul is useless.

Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and the rest shall be added unto you. Seek to be the doers of God's will, and nothing, nothing more. There will be everything: righteousness, and joy, and life, not to speak of bread and raiment, which are not needed. All that is needed is the daily bread, the food of life, of which Christ has spoken.

The fulfilment of God's will is the work of life; but wherein does the will of God consist? Shall we do this or that act, in order that we may do God's will? Shall we place ourselves in such or such conditions: give up the property, leave the family, arraign people? Shall we go to Nineveh or to Jerusalem? and so forth. And there is no answer.

Neither the one, nor the other, nor the third is necessary, and no condition or act corresponds to the fulfilment of God's will; it not only does not correspond, but it even interferes, because every action according to one's own will, every change of situation, is an insubmission to the will of God. But the fulfilment of God's will, like his kingdom, is within us: the fulfilment is not in acts, but in submission, in a meek and humble relation to the demands of the life, in which one happens to be.

You say: the demands are contrary to conscience, or there are several contradictory demands, or none at all.

All you have to do is to bear yourself meekly and humbly in respect to the demands, if they are contrary to your conscience, that is, to refuse to fulfil them, without boasting or fury, but with humility and meekness; or, bear yourself with meekness and humility in respect to the demands which seem to be contradictory, turning away from your will, in the presence of God alone, and the contradiction will be removed. But it is impossible that there should be no demands. Even the mere needs of the body are demands, and it is possible to eat and sleep and cover oneself with meekness and humility.

Yes, the will of God is not in this, what to do (what to do life shows), but how to do. *How* is that which creates the true spiritual life.

I lately thought of this, that it is the business of a Christian to do the will of the Father; but wherein is the will of the Father? How are we to find out, so as not to make a mistake? Or I might

begin to think that it is the will of the Father that I should preach, or live this way or that way, — live with the family, or without it. And if you begin to question yourself in this manner, you will never find out wherein is the will of the Father, and you will arrive at doubt and dejection: why are we commanded to do the will of the Father, and not shown in what it consists?

And this is the way I think about it: that the will of the Father is clearly shown to us, but that we do not seek it where it is shown to us. We think all the time that the will of the Father can be in external works, like Abraham's going into a strange land, and so forth; but the will of the Father is only in this, that we should be meek and humble in the yoke into which we are hitched, and that, without asking whither, why, what we are hauling, we should pull as long as we have strength, and stop when we are told to, and should pull again when we are told to, and turn whither we are told to, and not ask why and whither. "Take my yoke upon yourselves and learn of me, because I am meek and humble."

Be meek and humble, be satisfied with everything and prepared for every situation, and you will do the will of the Father. Thus, to fulfil the will of the Father, it is necessary to find out, not what to do, but how to do what we are called to do.

Life is in the doing of the will of God. In what does this will of God consist?

Everything which we may set as our aim, as the will of God, — everything is insufficient, incomplete, — everything is only a sign, but not the will itself of God, just as an individual labourer cannot understand the whole work of the contractor. (However miserable and petty this comparison of the will of God is, that is, the comparison of everything, with the will of the contractor, it by its very inadequacy shows how impossible it is for man to understand the will of God.) We, too, have a sign that we are doing the will of God, but the will of God we never know. By all these signs we can tell that we are doing his will; but that wherein his will consists will always remain a mystery to us.

And so it must be. There could be no life, no eternal life, if the aim toward which we strive were intelligible to us, — consequently, finite.

But there are given to us the most incontestable signs that we are living according to his will, and not contrary to it, as the reins permit a horse to go in one direction only.

The very first, chief, incontestable sign, which we are so prone to neglect, is the absence of a sensation of spiritual suffering (as with the horse the absence of the sensation of pain from the bit). If you experience full liberty, which is not impaired by anything, you are living according to God's will.

Another sign, which verifies the first, is the unimpaired love for men. If you feel no hostility toward any one, and know that people do not feel evil toward you, you are in the will of God.

A third sign, which again verifies the first and is verified by it, is spiritual growth. If you feel that you are becoming more spiritual, if you conquer the animal, you are in the will of God.

We know, we know for certain, when we are living according to the will of God; but we do not know God's will itself, and we must remember, must know, that we do not know and cannot know it, and must not put forth external aims, identifying them with the will of God, no matter how high these aims may appear, as, for example, the instruction of men in the truths of religion, the actual establishment of the kingdom of God upon earth, the indication of an example of a godly life, and many other things.

The mare knows for certain that she is walking according to the will of her master when the reins do not jerk her, but she does not know the master's will, and woe to her if she imagines that she does know this will. The master turns the bespattered mare from the highway into the mud

and compels her to enter into a dirty yard, which is crowded with other horses. It seems clear to the mare that it is the master's will that she should pull a load along the highway, and she pulls the load; but the turning into the dirt of the yard and the keeping company with other horses, — that, according to the mare's judgment, is not what the master must want, and she is stubborn, and complains, and suffers. She does not know that the master turned her into the yard in order to put the load on other horses and to feed the mare, for he is compassionate with her, expecting a colt from her.

Even so I have often been stubborn, complaining of my fate and of the reins which led whither they led me, and I suffered. It was all due to this, that I imagined a certain realization in the world of God's will. There, I have given up my property, have renounced all luxury, and live, showing by my example how one can and must live according to God's will. . . . Suddenly I am turned to one side, into the mud, where it is crowded. I think that God's work is retarded and impaired by this; whereas it is really being accomplished by it, so long as the signs are in evidence that I am living according to God's will.

I am seeking for the nearest consequences, and am grieved because I do not see them, and I do not know those consequences which are a million times greater and are obtained in this roundabout way.

We must live for the purpose of doing the will of him who has sent us into the world, and we must live in such a way that this will can be fulfilled. The fulfilment of this will gives us the right to live, or, to express myself more exactly, gives us the assurance that our life not only has a meaning, but is also necessary and needful for him who has sent us into the world.

But you will ask: "In what does this will consist, and how are we to know when we do it, and when not?" This will demands two things of us: a constant self-perfection and a constant cooperation with the establishment of the kingdom of God upon earth, that is, of an order of things, in which all men would recognize themselves as equal brothers and would love one another. In order that you may know with each piece of work whether you are doing the will of him who has sent you, or not, you must ask yourself whether this work contributes at the same time to your perfection (but perfection consists in the increase of love) and to the establishment of the kingdom of God, that is, the increase of love in men. If the work satisfies only one thing, your perfection, but does not serve men by increasing the love in them; if it serves men, but does not evoke love in thee, increasing it, — it is not God's work, not the fulfilment of his will.

Briefly expressed, the meaning of life is this, that every live man is God's tool, a tool through which the higher power does its work. And so the meaning of life consists in doing in the best manner possible the work which this higher power demands of you. And you can always know whether you are doing this work, or not: conscience is an indicator of it. All you have to do is to listen to it and to try to make it more and more sensitive.

One has frequently occasion to hear and read controversies and discussions as to what should be the aim of human life, — internal moral perfection or the service of humanity, the establishment of the kingdom of God. This controversy can never be settled, because both sides are right: both aims are set before man and humanity, and one aim not only does not exclude the other, but, on the contrary, both coincide, and one conditions the other.

What aim must a mason set to himself in taking part in the work of rearing a structure, — the greatest perfection of the work of his day, or the building of the structure? The mason will reach the highest perfection of the work of his day only when he will have as an aim the building of

the structure, and he can contribute to the building of the structure only when he will strive after performing the work of his day in the best manner possible.

Only by setting as an external aim the establishment of the kingdom of God, does man reach the highest perfection of life which is accessible to him; and only by striving after this highest perfection of life and obtaining it, does he cooperate with the establishment of the kingdom of God.

Both he who strives after the perfection of human life, after the establishment of the kingdom of God, without establishing it in himself, and he who strives after a personal self-perfection which has not for its aim the establishment of the kingdom of God outside himself, are equally in error and do not fulfil their vocations.

Man is placed in such circumstances that the only possible, true, rational good for him consists in the striving after personal self-perfection; but the personal self-perfection is such that it is attained only when man recognizes himself as a tool of God for the establishment of his kingdom.

“The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there: for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”

In proportion as a man attains internal perfection, he establishes the kingdom of God, and only in establishing the kingdom of God does he move toward internal perfection. Without the consciousness of this, that my effort cooperates with the establishment of the kingdom of God by the approach to the perfection of the Father, there would be no life. And so each of us lives only in proportion as he establishes the kingdom of God within himself and perfects himself inwardly.

The assertion that man may slight his moral obligations with the view of attaining general ends is like what a man would do if he asked: “What must the aim of a stoker, or water-carrier, or smith be in a manufacturing plant,— to look after the fires, haul water, forge a hook, or to care for the business of the whole establishment?”

Neither the one nor the other aim taken separately satisfies the demands of human life, because both aims are set at the same time before man and humanity, and one aim not only does not exclude the other, but on the contrary, both coincide, and one conditions the other.

In order to do God’s will it is necessary to do his work; in order to do his work two things are needed, not separately, but both together: what is needed is reason and love, and truth and good; it is necessary for reason to be love-bearing, that is, for its activity to have love for its aim, or for love to be rational, that is, for love not to be contrary to reason.

An example of the first is the scientific activity of the mind: the investigation of the milky way, the finesses of metaphysics, the natural sciences, art for art’s sake; an example of the second is the love for one woman, for one’s children, for one’s nation, a love which has for its aim, not the spiritual, but the animal good.

The fruit of the activity of reason is truth; the fruit of the activity of love is goodness. But in order that there may be fruit it is necessary for both activities to coincide. Goodness will come only- from a rational love which is verified by truth, and truth will result only from a lovebearing activity which has for its aim the good of reason.

All this is not my invention, but I have seen it.

We all think that our duty, our calling, is to do various things: to educate the children, acquire a fortune, write books, discover a scientific law; but we need only one thing, and that is, that our life may be unimpaired, good, and rational, — not before men, leaving behind us the memory of a good life, but before God: to offer ourselves to him, our soul, better than it was, nearer to him, more in harmony with him. It is very hard to think so, still more to feel so. One gets so easily

off the track in the direction of human glory, but this can and must be. Help me, God! I feel it at times, and even now.

I have been thinking of what one ought to remember in moments of dejection of spirit, of grief, fear, annoyance, or anger at people:

Remember that your life is only in doing the will of God upon earth; but it is impossible to do the will of God: you can only increase your spiritual essence; and you can increase your spiritual essence by the observance of purity in your animal, of humility in your human (worldly), and of love in your divine life. But for the observance of purity you need privations, for humility — ill fame and humiliations, for love — the enmity of men toward you (“If ye love them that love you, what reward,” etc.). And so, what you call sufferings, what you complain about, what causes you worry, what you are sorry for, what you fear, — all this is nothing but privations and pains, or ill fame, offences, humiliations, or enmity of men toward you; but all these are necessary for you, in order that you may preserve purity, humility, love, — that you may increase your spiritual essence, that you may serve the kingdom of God, — for life. And so I must not be grieved, but rejoice at privations, and humiliations, and enmity.

Indeed, could God have placed man in such a terrible position, where he would bear privations, humiliations, and enmity, without receiving his rewards for it? This is not possible, and it does not exist. It is impossible to answer whether there is any reward in the other world, or not. The question is incorrectly put. First it is necessary to change the false view, which ought not to be, from which such a question can arise. It is as though lazy people, starving as the result of their laziness, should ask whether they will receive a reward in the next world, because they are obliged to work in order to feed themselves. There will be no reward; but we must understand that the work which gives bread is a necessary condition of animal life. Even so we must understand that the endurance of privations, humiliations, and enmity is a necessary condition of the spiritual life.

The chief delusion of human life is this, that it appears to each one individually that the striving after enjoyment and the disgust at suffering form the guide of his life. And man, all alone, without any guidance, entrusts himself to this guide, seeks enjoyments, and avoids sufferings, and assumes that the aim and meaning of life lies in this. But man can never live by enjoying himself, and cannot avoid sufferings. Consequently the aim of life cannot lie in this. And if it did, how absurd ! The aim is enjoyments, and they do not exist and cannot exist. And if they existed, the end of life is death, which is always connected with sufferings. If a sailor decided that it is his aim to avoid the rise of the waves, whither would he sail? The aim of life is outside of enjoyments and sufferings. It is attained by passing through them. Enjoyments, sufferings, — they are the breath of life: the inhalation and the exhalation, the food and its discharge. To place one’s aim in enjoyments and in the avoidance of sufferings means to lose the path which cuts through them. The aim of life is general or spiritual.

“Repent ye, come to your senses.” You must understand the insipidity of the meaning which you ascribe to life. Look at yourself, and understand who you are, what you are, and what you live for. The personal good of the individual man, or even of the family or of the state, cannot be the aim of your life. He did not teach them anything new, but only opened their eyes to what they themselves cannot help but see, to this, that the meaning of human life does not consist in each man’s acquiring his personal, frail, deceptive, and short-lived good at the expense of another. The meaning of your life, he said to them, can be only in the fulfilment of that will which, for the attainment of its ends, has sent you into this life. But this will, which consists in

the establishment of the kingdom of God, that is, in the union and love of all creatures among themselves, coincides with that fundamental striving after the good which lies in your soul. You must understand that your life is not yours, not your property, but his who produced it for his own purposes, and that the highest possible good is given you only under the condition of doing his will. Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and the rest shall be added unto you.

Be always ready for that hour. Be ready for it, like a master watching his house, like the virgins with the lamps, meeting the bridegroom. And not only be prepared to meet this hour, but work with all your might that it may be near, as the servants had to work, when the master going away entrusted them with various amounts of talents, according to their strength (Matt, xxiv., xxv.).

One side of Christ's teaching, which is connected with everything else and is even fundamental, was completely obscured, and even concealed from us by his deification, namely, his teaching of the embassy. Remember how often and from how many sides he says that he is doing the will of him who sent him; that he is nothing himself, but that he is an ambassador and unites his life with him who has sent him; that his whole life, its whole meaning, is the fulfilment of the embassy. Only our recognizing him as a special being, and not as a man, such as we are, could have concealed from us this foundation of his teaching.

I have now arrived at it, and understand it with my whole being. Endless doubts and obscurities in life in the fulfilment of Christ's teaching had always tormented me. I solved them the best I knew how, but I always felt my lack of clearness and firmness. And only now has it become clear to me that the solution of all doubts and difficulties in the execution of the teaching consists in this, that we do not recognize in life that one meaning which it has, and which Christ has pointed out to us, — the service of truth (that higher truth which you comprehend) and its implanting not only in men, but also in the whole world.

Life is given you with your reason for this very purpose, that you may introduce this reason into the world, and so the whole of life is nothing but this rational activity as manifested in me. Christ understood himself as an ambassador, and so taught us. Every one of us is a power which is conscious of itself, which is conscious of its common aim, and so joyfully tends toward this aim, — a flying stone that knows whither it is flying, and that it is itself nothing, a stone, and that all its significance is in this flight.

We need only make this view of life our own (namely, the force of Christ's teaching) and all terrors and doubts disappear. My chief work does not consist merely in keeping the five commandments, in not having any property, in not sinning, — all those are not works, but conditions under which I can be sure that I am fulfilling my calling, and forms of my interaction with others, — but my work is to Eve, by introducing the rational principle into the world, using for that purpose all the means at my command.

I can fall, sin, err, — the work of my life will not change in consequence of this, nor will my happiness and the peace of my life. But with this view the idle commiserations, and the wishes, and the terror of death, are annihilated, and the whole of life is transformed into the present.

If my whole life consists in shedding upon others the light which is within me, that is, if my life is in the light, my death not only fails to be terrible, but is joyous, because each of us with his personality dims the light which he bears. Physical death frequently contributes to that light in which life is centred.

The practical application is this, that each of us must place all the interests of his life in carrying the truth through life and implanting it in others, and then there will be no doubts and no

sufferings and no idleness for him. Each of us is always surrounded by men, and so can always do his work of life.

How we must always remember our dignity of God's ambassador, to whom God's work has been entrusted ! If I were the Tsar's ambassador in Turkey, how I would take care of myself! But now I am God's ambassador in the world, and so everything must give way to that. The Tsar may not find out something, but here it is impossible to conceal anything.

Man is an ambassador, as Christ has said, — that's it, an ambassador, to whom all that is important is to carry out what has been entrusted to him, and who does not care what they think of him. Let them think ill: sometimes that is necessary, provided the embassy has been accomplished.

We are sent to walk over that inclined path, carrying through it that light which has been entrusted to us. And all we can do is to aid one another on the path to carry this light, but we detain and push one another, and put out our light and that of others.

If we do not look upon our life as upon an embassy, there is no life, but only a hell. I must remember, not only that I am an ambassador, entrusted with some work, but also that I am an ambassador who must guard, and uplift, and increase himself. Both are the same: one can uplift himself only by doing his work, and by uplifting and increasing oneself, one can do his work.

To live in godly fashion means to wish what God wishes; but God wishes the good of the world; but the good of the world is obtained by increasing love in it.

To live in godly fashion means to live for the good of self as not separated from other beings.

Does not to live in godly fashion mean to give life to others, to rouse in others the spiritual, true life?

One can live badly only with lusts, and well — with this alone: with goodness, with the desire, the effort to be good, better.

My life is not mine, — cannot have my good for its aim, — but his who sent me, and its aim is the fulfilment of his work. Only by fulfilling his work can I obtain the good.

You know that; but for me it is so important, such a joy, that I rejoice at every opportunity to repeat it.

The aim of life is the good. The good is only in serving God. Serving God is in the increase of love in the world. The increase of love in the world is obtained only through the increase and manifestation of love in oneself. But love in oneself gives us that greater good after which we strive.

The aim of life is as little the reproduction of ones like, the continuation of the species, as the service of men, — just as little the service of God.

To reproduce one's like, — what for? To serve men? And what are those to do whom we shall serve? To serve God? Can he not do without us what he wants? But he can want nothing.

If he commands us to serve him, he does so for our own good. Life can have no other aim than the good, than joy. Only this aim, joy, is fully worthy of life.

Renunciation, the cross, to give up life, — all this is for joy's sake.

The joy is and can be impaired by nothing, and is constant.

Death is a transition to new, unexplored, entirely new, different, greater joy.

There are springs of joy which never run dry: the beauty of Nature, of animals, of men, are never absent. In prison, — the beauty of the beam, the fly, the sounds. The chief spring is love, — mine for people, and the people's for me.

Beauty, joy, only as joy, independently of the good, is disgusting. I made this clear, and gave it up. The good without beauty is tormenting. Only the union of the two, no, not the union, but beauty as the crown of the good.

Mill says that humanity will get a greater share of happiness when every man will pursue his own happiness, under the condition of observing the rules and conditions demanded for the good of others, than when man will set for himself as his only aim the good of all others.

That is true, only that by the good of each individual we must understand his spiritual good, that is, his agreement with the will of God, or, more simply, the gratification of the demands of his conscience (reason and love).

Let each man seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, let him put his life into this, and there will result the greatest happiness for all. But then it will turn out that the happiness of man will consist in observing those rules and conditions which secure the greatest good to all men, that is, we shall get precisely what Mill denies.

We are all labourers in life, charged to attend to the work of the salvation of our souls, — we may compare it with the watching of the fire given from heaven and kindled on the hearth of my body. My business is only to watch and kindle this fire within me (not to waste the material of this fire on anything but the burning), without thinking of what will burn from this fire or how.

It is not hard to thresh with several flails, but that things should go well, and the threshers should not get mixed (not merely threshing, but interfering with one another), one has only to think of oneself, one's measure of the beat on which to strike. But the moment you think of others and look at them, you get mixed. Even so it is in life. Think only of yourself, your work, and the work is this: to love, to increase this love in yourself, and not to think of others, of the consequences of your labour, — and the work of life proceeds fruitfully and joyfully. The moment you think of what you are producing, of the results of your labour, and begin to measure it with these results, the work gets mixed up and comes to a stop, and there is the consciousness of the vanity of life.

The master of life has given us work, to each one individually, so that the accomplishment of this work is very fruitful. He himself will utilize and direct this work, and will give it a place and significance. But the moment I want to find and determine a place for it and in conformity with it to modify it, I get mixed, see the vanity of the work, and am in despair. My business is to work, and he knows what it is wanted for, and how to use it. Man walks, God leads.

One work is, — to increase love in myself. I am a self-moving force, or a living spade, and its life consists in keeping the edges clean and sharp, and then it will work, and the work will be needed. Keep it sharp, and sharpen it all the time, — make yourself better and better.

What seemed irrefutable from the social point of view appears meaningless from the Christian point of view. This change is due to the change of aim which is placed before man. The Christian teaching puts a different aim in the place of the one set by the social teaching.

The aim which Christianity sets to people is not the good of this or that totality of men, attained by the fulfilment of the will and of the laws of this totality, but the highest good of all men and of the whole world, which is attainable by doing the will and keeping the law of God.

It is possible to think that we can live for God, cooperate with the establishment of the kingdom of God, mainly by persuading people to be good, to refrain from offences, — by establishing the lives of other men.

This is a delusion: we can live for God only by loving men, by manifesting love, infecting others with love, making them believe in love.

I must know this now by all means, and I decide that it is not necessary to arrange anything or to admonish people, but only to treat them with love and kindness. This is the strongest means for establishing the kingdom of God.

No proposition has so obviously been verified by me through experience as that the meaning of life is in the increase of love. As long as I remembered this and lived by it, I was unceasingly happy.

Our life, the life both of an old and a young man, is subject to the possibility of an instantaneous cessation, and so we must not put off the fulfilment of our life's work, — serving God and men, — but we must live and serve God and men at once, every minute of our life. But serving God and men consists in the increase of love in ourselves and in others, and this we can always do under any conditions.

It is man's task to fulfil in this life that for which he has been sent into it by God, from whom he has proceeded and to whom he goes. What God wants of man is that he should expend his life, his body, in order to serve the good of the world and the good of all men and of all beings. This a man can do by renouncing his animal personality and evoking in himself love for men and for all beings.

In man there is a spiritual, immortal, divine essence and his animal personality. If man thinks that his life is in his body, he will serve the body, will ruin his soul, and will not accomplish his task; but if he recognizes as himself his divine, spiritual essence and lives for it in godly fashion, and wishes for it what God wishes, that is, not his good, but the good of all beings, he will fulfil his task and will receive the true good.

If you have any power of activity, let it be one of love; if you have not, and you are weak, let your weakness be that of love.

As an athlete attends to the increase of his muscles, so you must attend to the increase of love or, at least, to the diminution of malice and lying, and there will be a full, joyous life.

I just thought that I must remember that the time for the fulfilment of the work set for me in this world is . on the decline, and that it is a sin to waste it unproductively, that is, not in the service of God's work.

No matter how much I have reflected on the question of the relation of God's work to the internal perfection of love, I cannot get away from that proposition that the problem of life — the execution of the divine work of the destruction of disunion — is equal to an increase of love, and that this work can be accomplished only through works in which there takes place an inner perfection in love.

I write and I think as follows.

The aim of life is the permeation of all its phenomena by love, — a slow, gradual transformation of an evil life into one that is good, — the creation of the true life (for the true life is only a life of love), — the birth of the true life, that is, of the life of love.

“What is the essence of that work which ought to proceed in parallel lines with a strictly regulated life?” you ask.

The work which you are called to do in life is of a twofold nature, though it is attained by one and the same action: the external work consists in this, that with our life we should cooperate in the establishment of the kingdom of God upon earth, that is, the substitution of concord, mutual aid, and union for enmity, struggle, and disunion, — a condition when all the spears should be forged into ploughshares, etc. We can contribute to this by truthfulness in words and deeds. The internal work consists in perfection, in the approach to God: “Be ye perfect even as your Father

in heaven is perfect.” But in order that we may constantly improve, it is necessary to increase love in ourselves, that is, widen the circle of love in ourselves, to love, not because it is agreeable to us, but as God loves his creatures, in order to wish and offer them the good. But in order to increase love in ourselves, we must not interfere with its manifestation and growth. It always strives of itself after increase. What interferes with the manifestation of love is the offences. Now, the offences consist in regarding as the good and as the aim of one’s life the good of the animal personality, and not the increase of love. The increase of love is that action by means of which both aims are attained: the cooperation in the establishment of the kingdom of God, and the attainment of the highest perfection. . . . Such a life has a greater probability even of an earthly happiness than a worldly life, which has for its aim the good of the animal personality. Such a life does not exclude all the most accessible joys, which are furnished by Nature, and by merriment, and singing, and friendship, and communion with men and animals.

Life for oneself is torment, for one wants to live for an illusion, for what is not, and this not only fails to be happy, but cannot be at all. It is the same as clothing and feeding a shadow. Life is only outside ourselves, in the service of others, and not in the service of relatives and beloved persons, — this is again for self, — but in the service of those you do not love, — better still in the service of your enemies.

The whole life which I lead is only a *tatonnement*; but life ought to be built firmly on this: to seek, desire, do nothing but good to people, — to love and increase love in them, to diminish enmity in them. The good of men? What is the good? This, — love. I know this in myself, and so wish men nothing but this, and work for nothing else. To live boldly by this, and not by groping, means to forget that you are a Russian, a lord, a peasant, married, a father, and so forth, and only to remember this: before you is a live man; as long as you live, you can do what will give him and you the good, and do the will of God, of him who sent you into the world, — you can unite yourself with him in love.

I have experienced the joyous feeling of transferring the meaning of life to a desire to serve God by means of serving men, — a desire for the good for all men with whom I meet.

Such a life is possible and joyous.

Ask yourself well which of the two you want: that you be glorified at once, that you may see the fruits of your works, but that doubt in your work be possible? or, that you should be misunderstood and scorned to the end, but that your work should certainly be the work of God?

How terrible it is to forget God! But this is done imperceptibly. Works for God give way to works for men, for glory, and then for oneself, for one’s bad self. And when you rub against this badness, you want to raise yourself again.

Frequently one wastes his spiritual powers for nothing. That is a sin. These powers are given for serving. They ought to be spent on nothing else; but, as it is, out of decency, out of ambition, out of apathy, you waste yourself in such a way that no strength and no time is left for serving.

Whether you have done what you ought to receive an enormous importance, because the only meaning of your life is in this, whether in the short period of life given to you you are doing what is wanted of you by him or it that sent you into life.

Are you doing the right thing?

The pagan conception tells you that your life is your carnal possession; Christianity tells you that your life is that vineyard which was given to the husbandmen with all the trees and the well and fruit, only that the husbandmen, making use of the vineyard, might give its fruits to the owner.

We are given but a short time to stay here. Now, now, we shall all be taken back there, all at once or singly,— some are being already taken away in our sight, — and we have the choice: to pass this short, indefinite period in a joyful manner, abandoning ourselves to our innate feeling of compassion and love for one another, or to quarrel, contend, fight, and with all cruelties to establish an order of things which, we know, will not last even a few years, and which we do not approve of; to pass the moment given to us, loving one another and practising mutual love and kindness, or to use all our strength for the purpose of tormenting and infuriating one another as much as possible during this short space of time, and with malice, reproaches, and curses to be taken back whence they let us out.

In the comprehension of truth, that is, of what is wanted of you by him who does his work through you, only in this does your life consist.

Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and the rest shall be added unto you.

In caring for worldly matters, for what to you seems to be necessary for securing your carnal personality and the lives of other people who are bound with you, you will obtain, neither the good of this personality, nor the good of the other people, though you put it before you as your aim; but in caring for the truth of the kingdom of God, which is obtained by recognizing and fulfilling that degree of truth which is revealed to you, you attain both your own good and that of the other people, and fulfil what has been implanted in your reason and your heart. How can you help doing this?

Men have assured themselves that this is not important, that something else is important. But there is nothing more important in the world than performing the truth, which is revealed to man.

Nothing but this one thing is needed, namely, what we neglect, — the fulfilment in little deeds of the truth which we know. The fulfilment of the truth by every individual man is the most important work.

Man's life of suffering, which is liable to be severed at any second, not to be a coarse sneer, must have such a meaning that the significance of life is not impaired by its long or short duration.

If a man knew for certain that his life comes to an end with this life, what would he do in the decline of his years, in which I am? All the present affairs have already passed into other, younger hands, so what is he to do?

Only when you believe that life does not end here, there is left an always most important and always interesting and necessary work over one's soul, which does not perish, but will be necessary there.

Of late I have frequently thought of one long known consideration, which with especial vividness passes now through my brain and braces me up; it is this: to express in the simplest and clearest form the meaning, essence, and aim of life, I should say, as it is said in John vi. 38, and especially 39: to increase in me, to bring to the highest possible divineness that spark, that comprehension, which is given and entrusted to me, as a child is given to a nurse. This definition of the meaning of life is broader than any other, — it includes all the others.

Now, what is needed, in order to fulfil this, to raise up this child? Not luxury, hut work, struggle, privations, sufferings, humiliations, persecutions, precisely what is many times said in the Gospel. And it is this which we need that is sent to us in the most varied forms, both in small and in large proportions. If only we know how to accept it all in the proper manner, as necessary, and so joyous work, and not as something annoying which impairs our so well-arranged life.

Generally the following mistake is made. They say: "Here are circumstances which impair or threaten to impair our good life; we must as quickly as possible obviate and overcome these circumstances, in order that we may be able to continue our good life." In reality we ought to look upon the matter in a directly opposite way: "Here was a life which we established with great internal struggle and labours, and this life satisfied our moral demands; but now there appear new circumstances, which put forth new moral demands: come now, let us in the best manner possible respond to these demands." These circumstances are not an accident which can be removed, but the demands of new forms of life, in which I must try myself and for which I must prepare myself, as I prepared myself for the preceding form of life.

God, according to my conception, needs no sacrifices. All that God needs is that we should keep and increase that talent, that divine essence which is given to us, which is entrusted to us, as the child is to the nurse, understanding by this talent not some mental increase or culture, but only the increase of our love for God and his creation, so that a man who fulfils this work of God will always inevitably fulfil everything else, and will, without knowing it, be in many ways useful to all men.

Life is given me only under the condition of doing works of love. Life is given me as a talent, for its increase; but life cannot be increased otherwise than by works of love. My true life is only the one which is increased by me. Thus, by not keeping this life, but expending it, I acquire the true, the eternal life.

The main thing is to understand what is said (Matt, xxv.), that our life is not given us for our enjoyment or pleasure, but that we are slaves, tools, organs of God, predetermined to do his work (but an apparently unnoticed work, which you will do, may be a thousand times more important than loud works, which are known to us), and if we do this work, we are happy, no matter where or in what circumstances we may be, whether well or ill, old or young. But his work is this: to increase the talent, the divine spark, entrusted to me; now, it cannot be increased otherwise than by loving our neighbours and serving them, as indeed it says at the end of that chapter.

To be firm and not lose courage it is necessary, above all, to understand clearly and not to forget the one rational and joyous meaning of our life, which is, not only that we should carry through this life, without putting it out, that spark of divine love, which is implanted in us and forms our soul, but also that we should fan it with all our might, in order that it may be carried into the other life, not as a spark, but as a flame.

Nobody can fail to recognize that we have all come from and are dependent on one and the same principle, which Christ calls the Father, and that the meaning of our life consists in doing his will, the will of this principle, and in using our life for the very work for which it is given to us. But this work, we all know indubitably, consists in this, that we should with every day and hour of this life become better, that is, more self-sacrificing and loving, and participate in making the world at least a grain better than what it was when we entered into life. We must ourselves become better and make the world better; I believe all agree that in this lies the problem of man's life. Everything else, if this be agreed upon, may be yielded, or, at least, we may ask permission not to express any opinion about the Trinity, or about revolution, or about the Pope, or about Marx, and so forth. "I do not ask of you any belief in anything," we may say, "*except* that we must try to become better and make the world better."

That the aim of life is self-perfection, the perfection of the immortal soul, that this is the only aim of man's life, is just, if for no other reason than because every other aim is senseless in view of death.

These last days, especially yesterday, I have been feeling and applying to life the consciousness of this, that the aim of life is nothing but being perfect as the Father, doing the same that he does, that he wishes us to do, that is, to love; that love should guide us in minutes of the most energetic activity, and that we should breathe it in a moment of the greatest weakness. The moment something is hard and painful, we need only remember this, and everything hard and painful disappears, and nothing but what is joyful is left.

To a man who seriously, sincerely makes use of his intellect it is evident that all aims are closed to him; only one is rational: to live for the gratification of the demands of God, of one's conscience, one's higher nature (it is all one and the same). To express it in time,— to live in such a manner as to prepare one's soul for the transition into a better world; *to* express it precisely outside of time, — to unite one's life with its extra-temporal principle, with the good, with love, with God.

I am afraid of one thing, — lest this for me so powerful and beneficently acting consciousness of the one rationality and liberty, of the joyousness of life in God, be dulled and lose its liberating action, which elevates me above the petty cares of life. Oh, that it were so for all! And always so! Last night I reflected in this light on various phenomena of life, and I felt such joy and happiness. I will wait for the examination, — I will prepare myself for it.

Last night I thought in a dream that the shortest expression of the meaning of life is this: the world moves, is being perfected; it is man's task to contribute to this motion and to submit to and cooperate with it.

To serve God and men, but how? With what? Perhaps there is not this possibility? It is not true, — this possibility is always given to you, — to become better.

There is but one meaning of life: self-perfection, — to improve one's soul. Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

When you are oppressed, when something torments you, remember that in life you alone are the life, and immediately you will feel easier and happier. As a rich man rejoices collecting his wealth, so you rejoice, if only you have placed your life in this alone. In order to attain this there are no obstacles. Everything which appears as grief, as an obstacle in life, is a broad step which places itself of its own accord under your feet in order that you may rise.

Each of us is a light, a divine essence, love, the son of God, enclosed in the body, in barriers, in a coloured lam tern, which we have still farther coloured with our passions and our habits, so that everything which we see we see only through this lantern. We cannot rise to look above it; above there is just such a glass, also painted by us, through which we see God. There is one thing we can do, and that is, not to look through the glass, but to concentrate ourselves upon ourselves, to recognize our light, and to make it flame up. This is the one salvation from the deceptions of life, from sufferings, from temptations. And this is a joy, and always possible.

I imagined vividly what a joyous, calm, and absolutely free life it would be, if we gave it entirely to God, that is, if in all circumstances of life we sought but this: to do what he wants, — to do it in disease, in insult, in humiliation, in suffering, in all offences, and in death, which then is only a change of destination.

And weakness, and non-fulfilment of what God wants? What then? Nothing: a return to the consciousness of this, that life is only in this fulfilment. Minutes of weakness are the intervals between the letters of life, not life.

The main thing is, that we are labourers, from whom the result of the labour is hidden, who are not permitted to make use of the work. One thing is possible: the participation in the work, the uniting of our interests with those of the master.

It is remarkable how this last deduction at which one arrives was definitely and in this precise form expressed by Christ. It is not even a comparison, but a fact. The whole life of men is work: work for the master (factory hands and others), the work of ploughing and sowing, of the harvest and again of sowing, the improvement of the soil, of the breeds, of the buildings, intellectual inventions, — all that is not for oneself, but for the use of all, and in all that there is a good in the work itself. Such is the whole of life. We are permitted only to enjoy the good of the work itself. We are also permitted to transfer our interest to the interest of others, outside ourselves, to the interest of the master or the work; and this transference of the interest, this liberation of self from the interest of the perishing self, is possible only through work.

So it is in the labours of life. And just so it is in all life, if we look upon our whole temporal, carnal life, upon the direction of our will in this life (and we cannot look in any other way upon it), as upon labour for the work of God, or, more briefly, for God. Only if we pass our whole life with the purpose of fulfilling the will of God and of establishing the kingdom of truth, wherever we see it, and in the observance of the truth, in humility and love, even where we do not see it, — can we, in the work for God, renounce our own interest, in order to find an interest in the work for God. To say that you will make use of this work in the future is risky and inexact: it is impossible to say the rest. And why should it be? The participation in the work gives enough of the good. The moment you begin to take part in it, you feel the good; what, then, will happen if you give yourself entirely over to this work, and make a habit of it? Then the true good will be so great that it will not be necessary to imagine any other in the future.

Yes, this is a prayer which I will write down on my finger-nail: Remember that you are a labourer in God's work.

I have been thinking all the time of the harm of selecting an external aim for life. "Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and the rest shall be added unto you." Sailor, be guided by the compass which is on thy ship, — a tiny needle which is a thousand times smaller than the ship, — and not by any visible object, not even by the stars: everything is deceptive but what is within you. Do not trouble yourself about writing an important work, nor about this, that men may learn the truth, nor that you may remain pure in the eyes of men; trouble yourself only about doing the will of him who sent you. But the will of him who sent you is that nothing should perish of what he gave you, but that, on the contrary, everything possible should be resuscitated, brought back to life, expanded, purified.

It is true that thy work and thy power have been entrusted to me. Now, thy work consists in manifesting thyself in me and in the world. In this alone does my life consist.

It is true that in me is thy power, given to me for the purpose of fulfilling thy work. But thy work consists for me in increasing thy power in me and in the world.

I throw a chip into the whirlpool of the brook, and watch it circling around. A steamer is only a little bigger, but still such a chip; the earth is a mote, a thousand years are a minute. Everything is nothing, everything material is nothing; the one real, indubitable thing is the law by which everything is accomplished, both great and small, — the will of God.

A compositor who does not know the language sets type better in that he does not guess at the meaning in his own way. Even so we must live, without guessing at the meaning of what we are doing, — not guessing at the work which we suppose God needs, but doing one thing after

another according to what God commands, — setting letter after letter. Not I, but he, has given a meaning to the whole.

In order to know the will of the Father, we must know his true, fundamental will. The son's will always coincides with the Father's.

There will always be left one mystery for man, only one: What do I live for? There is but one rational answer: Because God wants it. Why does he want it? This is a secret, and this secret is covered only by the belief in God, by the belief that he, who is good, has done this for my good.

I have thought vividly and with joy of this, that my life and, so I conclude, the life of everything is the power of God, the whole power of life, which passes through me, through a (limited and organic) part of all, and I can allow this power to pass through me, or I may try to check it. My whole role in life is this: I cannot check it, but I can try to do so.

The life of the world presents itself to me like this: a liquid, or gas, or light, is streaming in through numberless tubes of various form. This light is the whole power of life, God. These tubes are we, all the beings. Some tubes are entirely immovable, others move a little, others again more, and, finally, we are very mobile tubes. We can let the light through completely, or we may bar it for a time.

What we call our life, our personal life, is the ability to cross the light, — not to let it through; but the true life is the ability to stand in such a way as to let the light through completely, without barring it. But when a man takes up this position, the motion of his life comes to an end. It ends when a man begins to take up this position. The motion of life ends, and then a man feels that he has done everything which he ought to do, only when he has removed himself as though he did not exist. When a man recognizes this negation of his personal existence, he transfers his life into what passes through him, into God.

I wanted to express more clearly in words, what is true, that there is in me God's power, which does the work of God; then I convinced myself that this is unnecessary. It is enough that I am not I, but the power of God acting in me. And so it says in John v. 19: "Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise."

What to us appears as the motion of our personal life is the motion of our form of life when we stand at an angle to the direction of God's will. But if we stand in the direction of God's will, it passes through us, no longer moving us, and then the illusion disappears, and we recognize that we, our life, is nothing but the power of God. Then there presents itself the necessity of transferring our consciousness from the integument of the form into the force of its direction. However, this difficulty is overcome of itself, and the question of immortality and of the future life is set aside. The consciousness of life is transferred from the moving form into the source of power, into the eternal, infinite will of God itself. From the consciousness of form I have passed to the consciousness of life itself. So how can I doubt that what alone exists, has been and will be, — that it will not die?

I am conscious of myself as of the power of life, which passes through me: the motion of my life is the wavering of this form, which stood at an angle to the direction of the power and which slowly took up a position in its direction. The axis of the direction is established, the motion stops, the carnal, personal life comes to an end, I pass into the power which goes through me.

But what is this infinite whole power? An eternal secret, and we need not know any further. All I know is that death is not terrible to me with it. "Into thy hands I commend my spirit?" The individualization, which was presented as the form through which I passed, comes to an end,

and I unite with the *all*. I began lately to feel that when I die I shall not die at all, but shall live in everything else.

THE END.

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Leo Tolstoy

On the Meaning of Life

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