

32963 Faith Column 2-15-11

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### ***The Meaning of Life***

Have you ever taken a philosophy class and read the ponderings of great minds which in their wisdom offered you their views on the meaning of life? Or have you read theology books, or studied scriptures, or attended services at your place of worship and been offered insights into life's meaning and purpose? We have. But we've noticed that even if the answers we are given through these sources to life's meaning are profound, unless those answers capture our imaginations and corroborate our own life experience, they soon fade from our minds.

Have any insights into life's meaning stuck with you? Angie Whitmer tells a story of being helped to understand life's meaning one summer, in a way that was so memorable and so effective, that it was formative for her for the rest of her life.

It seems Whitmer had registered for a summer course in Greek history and culture. Her professor was an elderly Greek man, Dr. Papaderos. He concluded his lectures in the customary fashion, asking: "Are there any questions?" Whitmer reflects that his daily lectures about an ancient culture so influential and provocative had generated enough questions for a lifetime. So one day, when Papaderos made his usual offer to answer any questions, Whitmer spoke up, blurting out the most perplexing question on her mind. She asked: "Dr. Papaderos, what is the meaning of life?"

Papaderos looked at her for a long time, then determining that she was serious, he replied: "I will answer your question." Papaderos took from his pocket a very small piece of mirror and explained that he had found it many, many years ago. As a child, during World War II, he had lived in a remote village in Greece. One day, on the road, he had found broken pieces of a mirror from a wrecked German motorcycle. Unable to reassemble the whole mirror, Papaderos had kept the largest piece and filed its edges smooth and round on a rock. He first played with it as a toy and became fascinated with its ability to reflect light into dark places where the sun would never shine: holes, crevices, closets. It became a game for him to get light into the most inaccessible places possible.

Papaderos continued by telling her that when he grew up he kept the mirror as a reminder that he was not the source of the light in the world. But light—truth, understanding, knowledge, faith—does exist, and can only shine in many dark places if he helped to reflect it. He could function like his small mirror, just a part of a much greater reflective surface, but able nevertheless to shine light into dark and gloomy places. That, he said, was the meaning of his life.

When he finished speaking, Papaderos took his small mirror and, holding it carefully, caught the bright rays of daylight streaming through the window and reflected them onto Whitmer's face and her folded hands.

The rest of the lessons on Greek history and culture from that summer have slipped from Whitmer's memory, she says. But this one has been forever retained. She saw the gleam of a reflected light that has never faded away. And she has tried, in her turn, to pass on that reflected light.

What is the meaning of life for you? We hope you shine with it.