

October 21, 2026



PASTORAL MEDITATION by Rev. Thomas Hawkins

PURPOSE ANXIETY AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

I learned a new expression this week: "Purpose Anxiety." The term was first coined by a graduate student in psychology a decade ago and describes our response to the difficulty that many of us have trying to sort out what we should do with our lives. Is our purpose in life to have a career where we earn a good income? Is our purpose to have enjoyable or stimulating experiences? Is our purpose to contribute to the well-being of the world or other people? How do we know that our presence here on this small planet in a distant part of our galaxy will matter, not just to ourselves but to the universe itself. As Mary Oliver asks in her poem, "The Summer Day" – "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

Not long ago someone in our congregation mentioned to me a book entitled: *Mattering: The Secret to a Life of Deep Connection and Purpose*. In it, Jennifer Wallace describes a pathway to finding purpose and joy in life. Reviewers suggest it's a perfect book for anyone asking how to have a life of purpose, a life that actually matters both to you as an individual as well as others around us. It's a book for anyone with "purpose anxiety," whether a recent empty nester, the recently retired, or the new graduate wondering what to do with their life. Whether we read Wallace's book or another resource on finding our purpose and meaning in life, there's not always an add-water-and-stir easy answer. Only we can discover the answer in our daily struggles and our moments of clarity and courage.

Which is to say – Purpose is a spiritual question.

When the Westminster Assembly gathered in 1647, English theologians, bishops, and pastors produced a shorter catechism for use in their churches. The very first Q&A asks about our purpose as men and women. It asks, "What is a man's [or woman's] chief end?" It then answers, saying that the chief end or purpose of our human journey is "to glorify God, and to enjoy [God] forever." In the explanatory small print, it quotes 1 Corinthians 10:31: "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." We can find ultimate purpose and meaning in whatever we do if we do it for the glory of God. J.S. Bach was not an English Puritan. As a good German Lutheran, he understood what the Westminster catechism was aiming for when he ended his sacred compositions with the letters "S.G.D.," meaning *Sola Gloria Deo* or "God's Glory Alone." When our deeds are not done for self-glorification or selfish purposes, the glory of God shines in and through them. Perhaps the answer to "purpose anxiety" is really this simple.

The 20th-century Christian mystic and teacher Howard Thurman answers the question of knowing our purpose with some simple advice: "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." One of the early Christian saints similarly wrote that the glory of God is a human being fully alive. So when we come alive in something we do, there's a good chance that's where God's glory is being made visible to the world in our faithful words and deeds.

It's also true that, over a lifetime, what makes us feel alive can change. Over time our experiences change us. Likewise, the world in which we find ourselves also changes. As James Russell Lowell's hymn says, "New occasions teach new duties; ancient values test our youth. They must upward still and onward, who would keep abreast of truth."

Novelist and Presbyterian minister Frederick Buechner, explains how amid changing lives and a changing world we keep abreast of our truest purposes. A good rule for finding our purpose is this: "the kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done. ... The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

Buechner in his *The Alphabet of Grace* explains that therefore the best way to discern our purpose is simply to get out of bed each morning and put on our shoes. “When you wake up in the morning, called by God to be a self again, if you want to know who you are, watch your feet. Because where your feet take you, that is who you are.” It’s not in some grand revelation or wonderful insight that the purpose of our lives is revealed. It’s in ordinary moments and daily encounters that we discover life’s meaning and our truest purpose . . . if we listen to our hearts, our bodies, and the Spirit.

With prayer, Pastor Thomas

SUNDAY WORSHIP in the sanctuary or livestream link: <http://www.facebook.com/churchontherotary/>

PASTRIES WITH THE PASTOR

Pastries with the Pastor will be Wednesday, October 28, 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

You are invited to informal conversation with Pastor Thomas over coffee or tea and pastries on Wednesday, October 28. This is an opportunity for spontaneous conversations with Pastor Thomas and each other around whatever questions or topics you bring to the table. Please join us in Butler Hall!

EVERGREENS & PINE BRANCHES

It's that time of year again when I will be making cemetery logs for the **CRAFT FAIR**. I really, really need some branches of evergreens from your yard or woods. Think of friends with evergreen trees that would share a few clippings with us. We are looking for any kind of evergreen. Examples – spruce, pine, yew, arborvitae, juniper, etc. These cemetery logs are very popular. We usually sell out before noon! Please bring these greens to the church this week. You can leave them near the back door of the apartment building. Thank you!

MAKING APPLE CRISP!

It's that time of year to make our annual delicious apple crisp for sale at the Christmas craft fair on Saturday, November 7th. We will be meeting in the church kitchen at **9:00 on Thursday, November 5th**. Please bring your peelers, knives, whatever you need to peel and fill baking pans with apples. We will then assemble the "crisp" part of the recipe and bake 8 pans of deliciousness.

Our fearless leader, Betty Rockwell, will be out of commission on that day 🤖, so I am asking for help from the usual gang of folks (*and any of you who would like join us*) to meet on the 5th of November to quickly assemble and bake this highly anticipated dessert for our annual craft fair.

Thanks so much, in advance.

IT'S TIME! CRAFT FAIR donation time!

- Please look through your gently used novels to donate for that area.
- Please look through your costume jewelry with an eye to donating pieces for another to enjoy.
- Please check those house plants to see if they might be divided. Do you have extra gently used/nearly new indoor/outdoor plant related items (pretty pots, gently used hand tools)? How about garden or plant books?
- Please consider baking for our bake sale room. Package these items in an attractive, easy to transport way. It also is very helpful to label what you've made. Pretty food sells quickly!

Join us for CHOIR REHEARSAL every Sunday after the worship service around 11:30

YOU HAVE ALREADY NOTICED...IT'S GETTING COLD

As you are once again able to take out your heavier winter clothes, remember that you have neighbors who have nothing to keep them warm. The First Congregational Church on the rotary will once again be collecting **gently used, clean, warm clothing** until **NOVEMBER 22** for men, women and children (even infants and toddlers). NOW we will also collect **CLEAN**, warm blankets. Everything will be donated to the critical work of the Springfield Rescue Mission serving your neighbors in the greater Springfield area.

Please place your donations in the box in the breezeway, or the big, blue bin outside. We accept warm clothing: coats, sweaters, vests, sweatshirts, hats, scarves, gloves, mittens, boots, etc. We also ask for **NEW** socks and underwear. Thank you for caring and taking the time to go through your closets. Your continued generosity will warm the lives of our neighbors in need during the coming cold winter months.

Mission & Outreach

THANK YOU NOTE

Dear Church Leadership and Congregation,

On behalf of the ELHS Girls Volleyball Booster Club, our players, and their families, I want to thank you for allowing us to use your property for our fundraising car wash!

We truly appreciate your generosity and willingness to support our team. Having a place to hold our fundraiser made a big difference and gave our players the opportunity to work together to raise money for the season.

We are so grateful to have the support of our local community. It is because of the kindness and generosity of organizations like yours that we are able to provide these opportunities for our student athletes.

Thank you again for your time, generosity, and support of the ELHS Girls Volleyball. We sincerely appreciate it!

With gratitude,

ELHS Girls Volleyball Booster Club

PRAYER

Everlasting God, in whom we live and move and have our being: You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Give us purity of heart and strength of purpose. May we glorify you in using the talents and experiences you bestow upon us to find joy in the service and care we extend to others. Amen.



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