



The Cursillo® Movement

National Cursillo® Center • P.O. Box 799 • Jarrell, TX 76537 • 512-746-2020 • Fax 512-746-2030 • www.natl-cursillo.org

THE MEANING OF LIFE

Source: Translation of a Spanish presentation given by Juan Ruiz at the National Cursillo Encounter held at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, July 20, 2012.

To speak about the person, their value and dignity is something that has always excited me. And to speak about the way “being a person” gives life meaning, seems fascinating. Even as much as I researched and prepared this rollo, I realized how little I knew about it. I realized that there are a multitude of psychologists, psychiatrists, theologians, teachers, and authors who also speak and write on this same topic and on many occasions, with differing views and apparently very well justified. All this study and preparation was the cause for me to have a deep reflection of my own “meaning of life”, which I thought I had already understood well.

It was exactly as it is when we are given a rollo for a Cursillo. First, you read the objective several times until it is clear what the rollo intends to say. Secondly, you begin to develop the outline in order to achieve the objective. And third, as all rollos are living testimony, in other words, the life of the rollista needs to incarnate the message of the rollo, a self-reflection begins in order to review our own life and analyze if we in fact are living the rollo. This is where the correction begins, of errors we have in our way of living and of whatever deficiencies we have in our Christian attitude which might exist, so that when the rollo is given, it can be totally true.

The exact same thing happened to me with this rollo, with the addition of a great accompanying challenge due to the great intellectual and spiritual capacity all of you have. Although I also know you have a huge capacity for understanding and charity, therefore, I ask that you have a little patience and that you do not throw any tomatoes at me too quickly.

Very well, from the condition proposed by the psychologist Abraham Maslow in 1953 of being “fully human” and the acknowledgement of an essential interior nature able to express and realize authentic individuality, emerges the study of the processes of expression of being. These experiences have to be lived from an awareness of being able to distinguish and integrate the different sensations of everyday life, shaping an “I” that is fulfilled and meaningful. This work explores and develops the qualities of “being” by means of its strength of expression, especially from the sole and urgent property of a realization of fulfillment and meaning.

The French philosopher Emmanuel Mounier also tells us that the “reality of being of every human being cannot be treated as an object. Once the basic needs of character are overcome, it requires meaning.”

In this rollo, we will view in greater depth some very important elements of this mentality; “meaning”, “life” and “being a person.” These elements are very profound and well-studied not only by Maslow but by many other students, teachers, theologians and psychologists. In other words, they are fundamental for all human beings.

And in order for me to fully understand this, and not confuse you too much, I chose to speak individually of each element. And then we will see if we combine them into one sentence that can help us to reflect and discover or re-discover “the meaning of life”. I mention this because, not being a psychologist or a theologian, I have to put it in simple terms I can understand in order to talk about them.

This reminds me of something that use to happen frequently in the university. We knew immediately who was taking the Psychology 101 class because they would begin analyzing and questioning the whole world and everything around them. It is an uncontrollable temptation because I have also done the same. So I do not want to commit the same sin and I will simply put this in common, ordinary terms so that everyone can understand.

MEANING

Starting with "meaning", we can say understanding of reality, perception in its distinct dimensions. Because beyond the information from the senses (hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell), because of the capacity of the rational being, we have a sense, in reference to the outside world of objects.

In this way, we can arrive at the meaning of size or the sense of perspective and, on the other hand, the exterior world of our conscience. Because beyond the sense of sight, is the meaning of the glance that helps us to admire the greatness of the creation of God in the person and in nature all around us. "We cannot see without admiring", our friend Eduardo would say.

And beyond the scents, there is the sense of having a sense for things and people that provides deeper knowledge of people in order to appreciate them not for what they have but for who they are.

Beyond the sense of hearing, is the sense of listening to understand what your sense of hearing perceives and to understand our brother or sister says.

This extension of our senses is what forms judgment or criterion, and by having a balance in our judgment, through our means of applying it, resides common sense. In other words, the capacity to distinguish what is true from what is false, to act reasonably.

By looking up in the dictionary, it also tells us of "meaning" as the reason for being as an objective. Or is the "why" of anything. It is funny to see how many times as good Cursillo leaders, we prepare and strive to explain very well the "how" of all the methodology of the charism of Cursillo, we invest very little time explaining the "why" of each element. When we know and are convinced of "why", the "how" is no longer important because it usually comes automatically from knowing the "why". In this way, the "how" is better understood and applied more effectively.

Mankind needs to understand that there is no abstract meaning of life but rather a mission that is automatically realized upon knowing the "why" of our existence. And this leads to the understanding that the meaning of life is simply discovering that life makes sense. And in the same way, that our life style influences the meaning of the same, and that the meaning of life of each one of us forms a lifestyle.

Of course, this requires that we constantly mold this meaning with the hope that we find the true meaning of life, which is not necessarily based on what we expect of life, but what life expects of us. Because it is not about being proud of the talent we have received, but the ability to transform the reality that we live in at any particular time.

LIFE

It is in this way that we begin to connect "meaning" to the second element, "life".

And to develop this element I needed to ask myself, *John Ruiz, what meaning does your life have? ... In what stage do you find yourself in discovering that life makes sense? ... And on what values are this*

meaning of life based on?

And I had to start from my own person, because we can never give what we do not have or do not live, no matter how much spiritual and intellectual knowledge we might have.

And furthermore, due to our academic and cultural education or the years we have lived, many times we begin to create values that are more comfortable and suitable for who we want to be, and we completely forget the Christian values, in other words the gospel of God that comes through Jesus Christ, and that can never change. Always seeking logic and scientific answers to everything that happens around us, we begin to distance ourselves from the presence of Christ and his values and begin to lose the true meaning of life. Little by little, we lose the balance needed for those Christian values, justifying all too well everything we want to be and do, in order to give life our own meaning to life. As a result, we begin to call what is “bad” “good”.

We begin to call exploiting the poor, “good luck”.

We begin to call laziness, “social assistance”.

We call tolerating abortion “freedom of choice.”

We call allowing pornography “freedom of expression”.

We call coveting the property of others “having ambition” and seeking “success”.

We call desiring another man’s wife, “charisma”.

We call killing the condemned “justice”.

We call failure to discipline our children, “allowing the development of their self-esteem.”

But on the contrary, we call our harsh behavior towards employees “discipline”.

We call our indifference towards strangers around us “privacy”.

We call the abuse of power, “politics.”

And we call the absolute and spiritual values of our ancestors and God “obsolete and outdated.”

And then we ask, why the world is like it is? ... Why are there so many suicides? ... Why are there so many famous and successful people that apparently have everything, who seek refuge in drugs and alcohol?... Why is it that people who appear to have everything in life need sleeping pills in order to sleep in peace? ...

The true meaning of life, which is actually the happiness all human beings seek, is not found in passing and relative values, but rather in the Christian values that according to the gospel of Jesus Christ. These are Christian values such as life itself, the dignity of each and every one of us, the truth, justice, generosity, goodness, humility, honesty, responsibility, and in the end, all that Jesus Christ himself taught us and left us in the gospel.

We forget, or do not know, maybe because nobody told us in a convincing manner that by living these Christian values, by living the gospel of Christ, we find a happiness that multiplies itself with each experience. We forget that that closeness to God Almighty can give us the inner peace that many times

we need in order to sleep and have a peaceful night.

By recognizing this peace and love in God, it helps us to accept its absolute value and to choose freely to try to live according to the values he left us through his Son Jesus Christ, and it helps us to see everything around us differently.

This helps us realize that life on earth is only temporary and that we cannot live as if we were to be in it forever, losing the opportunity to be happy.

It helps not only to see the problems that we have, but also the **Grace of God** that is always there to help us solve them.

It helps us to realize that what we wear is not as important as helping others to have something to wear.

It helps us realize that the size of our home is not as important as how many people we receive in it.

It helps us to understand that the great dream we have has no meaning in our life, nor for the Father in heaven, if we sell our conscience to obtain it.

These Christian values help us see clearly that our title or personality in life is not as important as the effort we put in to developing our talents in the best way possible.

Regarding friendship, it helps us to be conscientious, not of how many friends we have, but of how many consider us a friend.

And in these times of so much discrimination, this helps us to see, not the color of the skin of people, but the purity of their soul.

And inevitably, it helps us find happiness, sharing our life and our goods in fraternal love. That is to say, it makes our life full of meaning and happiness, because after all, our task as Christians is to make happiness and help rescue happiness that has been kidnapped and lost.

In brief, these Christian values give us the great capacity to complain less about the thorns on the rose stems, and instead enjoy the flower's most beautiful colors.

The true meaning of life, that this inner happiness can bring us, cannot be created or learned, but simply discovered since it is within reach to all human beings. It is the essence of our very being. To discover this way of life is to go about discovering we are God's children, brothers and sisters of Christ and living temples of the Holy Spirit. It reveals our own **contingency** and **transcendence**.

Man is a contingent being because he is, but he could not have been. In other words man receives his existence, he has being, but is not the being, and rather receives it continuously from the Only Being, that is our God Almighty. And I repeat, that we receive it constantly because although we are aware that we were created in His image **and likeness**, due to the relative values and reactions in the face of our reality, we remain with the image **and we forget the likeness**. "There is no worse atheist than the one who calls himself Christian, but acts like an atheist".

Man needs to understand that before going to God, he comes from Him, and continues to come from Him, because his existence is a continuous and uninterrupted receiving from Him. Thus, man is not only a being in existence with others or with the things around him, but constitutively also can be fully open to the will and to the reality of God.

The dictionary says *transcendence* means to go beyond a limit. This is of special importance with respect to the belief in immortality of the soul and in a final judgment and definitely in the belief in God that becomes in the main object of the transcendent dimension. Man transcends in the measure that he continually changes and transforms his life and his world and is automatically driven beyond his time and space. Also, as a human being, man is social by nature and cares for others and for future generations. Francisco Forteza said in the First Conversations of Cala Figuera that “Man, is a process of process, processing itself, a reality of realities becoming a reality.”

In other words, man has the capacity of conviction, decision and constancy for constant and individual growth and the achievement of an ideal that gives meaning to his life. But his growth needs to be born from within, without any manipulation or imposition. And in the process of this growth, we may find ourselves alone for a time because we do not all grow at the same speed. And perhaps we cannot walk at the same speed or rhythm as the person or persons we would most like to be with. But further ahead, we can be sure to find ourselves with others with whom we share an affinity and we can walk together for a while appreciating, understanding and loving one another. What is more, those who we leave behind, can also catch up to us, join us again, or go by us and leave us behind. **All this motivates us to continue growing and discovering moment by moment, the love and friendship of Jesus Christ, who is the one who truly gives us the true meaning of life.**

During this process of transcendence, we must also be aware that we may lose a friend, but our faith makes sure that we win another 20. What is more, we may lose that job and pay that we value so much, even though it totally consumes us. But the gospel assures us we will gain a better one that will give us the time to give God his due priority and enjoy his presence through spending time with our loved ones. We also may lose that car we love so much, but we would learn to walk and admire and value the people and nature that we have not discovered yet. **The bottom line is, that when the meaning of life is based on Christ and his gospel, we cannot be afraid of losing any possession.** Because it seems that when God takes one, it is only in order to open our hand and give us something better.

I cannot stop thanking God for having allowed my wife Conchita and yours truly to live the experience of the Cursillo at the beginning of our professional career, since we learned to work to live, and not live to work. Also, by giving God the priority, just like the gospel says, he has given us everything we need to attend to our children and grandchildren needs and retired at the first opportunity. As a result, after 9 years of retirement, we are still attending to the same needs and in addition, traveling and making friends in the name of Jesus, in many different parts of the world. And in all facets of our life, we have been able to confirm the significance of a message that I received on the internet that said that God answers in three different ways:

The first way is when you ask him for something and he immediately says “yes”. This makes us very happy and confirms the greatness of God's love.

The second way is when we ask for something and he says, “Not now wait a little more”. We kind of don't like this answer and start complaining and asking “why not, when all that we are doing is for him”.

The third way is when we ask for something and he says, definitely “NO!” Here we get so upset, that we don't even let him finish the sentence to tell us why not. We do not wait for him to say, definitely no because I have something better for you!

My wife Conchita and I can confirm the third way in the whole course of our lives after the Cursillo. And personally, I would say that even before the Cursillo, because reflecting on my whole life, I can confirm that thanks to my mother's prayers, the Lord has always given me something better.

The growth and the search for the true meaning of our life is not limited to any specific stage of our lives in this world. Our hope and vision cannot be limited to any stage of our earthly life. This would make us become like things, that are used and then thrown away.

When we base the entire meaning of our lives only a certain stage or on the relative values of the world, of which Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now his Holiness Benedict XVI spoke about, we make the meaning of our life something that is temporary that ends up making us into that “thing” that will be disposed of at the end of our earthly life.

I assume that all of us here present are fully convinced that man was not created simply to be born, grow, reproduce and die. That would place us at the same level with the plants and irrational animals, as we were told one day in the Ideal Rollo. Man was created not only to be born, grow, reproduce and die, but rather with the capacity to live forever.

Reflecting on these concepts a little I want to ask you a question. And I certainly do not hope or want you to give me the answer, but rather your answer to yourselves; *what stage is each of us at in this room, on discovering that life has true meaning? ...*

BEING A PERSON

When we recognize and freely allow the values of God to give meaning to our lives, we cannot do anything less than inject into every process the third element of the “person”, as I have been saying, because you cannot speak of the meaning of life without speaking of the person. Because what meaning would all I have said previous have, without God finest creation in the world? ... What would life be without that which God created in his image and likeness? ... What would all the meaning of life be without the person? ...

In the person is the core, the nucleus, the freedom to choose good or bad and the mentality to have the criterion to discern what is right and what is wrong. The person is the heart of life and it needs to be very clear what it means to “be a person” in order to understand the meaning that gives all of life, both on earth and eternally.

Right now I could quote the entire rollo on “the person” that Francisco Forteza gave us in the First Conversations of Cala Figuera because it was very explicit and covered all aspects and elements that relate the being a person with the foundational charism. If you have not read it, it is critical that you read and re-read it until it has penetrated your being and is a reality in your life and your way of thinking.

I say this because I have read it many times and have even presented rollos on that subject. But when I opened it again to refresh my mind, it seemed as if I was reading it for the first time. Perhaps that is because I am starting to lose it in the mind, a little or a lot. But it was fascinating to read it again and confirm the beauty of being a person and the great possibility and honor we have of projecting the image of our creator in our way of life.

I am thinking of the mentality that *there is no need to fix something that isn't broken*, nor to make things that have already been made, or write about something that is already written. Since I am obedient, I will attempt to give this subject a common ordinary perspective, so that people like me can finally understand. So any similarities to what Forteza or Eduardo already wrote, you can be sure it came from them. And it just cannot be any other way, when almost everything I know and I am trying to live of this Foundational Charism of Cursillo in Christianity came precisely from these two men.

According to the dictionary, *the person* is defined as “a rational being that is aware of himself and

possessing a self-identity.” It also defines the person as “a being gifted with capacity as well as intelligence and free will corresponding to its humanity, by which a person is a rational being aware of himself and his actions, with self- identity and totally independent.” Saint Thomas Aquinas also says, **“Man is a unique substance of a rational nature”**.

This *person* is someone who is able to think because they have intelligence, and is able to want because they have free will, is able to decide because they have freedom, and is capable of love because they were created by God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church # 362 says, “We were created in the image and likeness of God” which means that not only do we have a body, but also a spirit which we call the soul.

We are not divine persons, although some truly pretend to be, as only God can, nor are we angels who have only a spirit. God gave us a *body and a spirit* united in such a way that only allows us to be human persons.

If we only had a body, we would be used as objects are, and then disposed of. If we only had a soul (spirit) then we would be like the angels who cannot be seen or touched. *But as human persons we are the union of the two elements.* The two elements are essential to our own dignity and we need to give them the same attention.

Every human person is responsible for taking care of their body as much as their soul, giving each the attention it deserves.

And when we die, our bodies return to dust again, but our soul, being a spirit is immortal and cannot die. On the day of the final resurrection, our soul will be reunited once more with its body, as we hear at the end of the prayer of our creed : “... We pray for the resurrection of the dead and in the life of the world to come.”

God created all human beings so that as humans we might enjoy eternal life. This means that not only on earth, but also in heaven, will we enjoy both physical as well as spiritual happiness. Although our body will be different from the one we have now, it will be like that of the risen Christ.

In this respect, all human beings are equal and we have the same value. God gave us all one body and one soul. And as rational animals, he also gave us intelligence, free will, freedom and the capacity to love. And therefore, there should not be differences between us!

Jesus Christ always gave us the example of treating all men with the same love and respect. He came to the world to be close to all men, but above all, *the most sinful* because they were the most in need of being called to change their way of life. In this we can find one of the fundamental ideas of the mentality of the foundational charism of Cursillo, **“The Cursillo was created with the far away in mind although not exclusively”**.

Why did Jesus act like this? ... Because he knew that God, his Father *had made all men with the same value* and that all deserved to hear his word in order to have the opportunity to change, to save themselves and enjoy eternal happiness. We all have this same dignity because we are human persons.

I can never forget the words of our Holy Father John Paul II during his visit to New York. **“There is still a great multitude of people that need to be touched by the love of Christ.”** Pope Pius XII thought the same, and so did Eduardo Bonnín Aguilo when he was seeking the way, *so that the message of the love and friendship of Jesus Christ could reach those furthest away.*

PEOPLE ARE DIFFERENT

Now, even though he created us all with the same value and dignity, he also made us very different. And its a good thing that he did. Can you imagine how boring that would be ...? ☺

When we introduce ourselves to each other, we realize that each one of us has a name, each of us likes different things and we do different things, we have different families, some are tall, others are shorter; some of us have dark hair and others lighter, and some are more beautiful, like my wife Conchita says. Others are more skinny and uglier, and finally some of us like *some things* and others like *others*.

But the biggest difference is that God has created each one of us for a special mission that no one else can accomplish. God made us “original and one of a kind” giving us different characteristics, so we can accomplish in the best way possible, the distinct mission he has given us. And of course **we are all important to God**, but not in “a bunch”, rather, **God loves each of us individually**.

These characteristics, that God gave to each of us and that make us different from each other, are called qualities or talents, and to use them for good keeps us different and gives us an opportunity to be better people.

The qualities may be the very simple things, but still these are things that God gave to us in order to be better people and, in this way, accomplish our mission in the place, the state and condition of life he wanted for each of us.

God wants us as we are, but he also wants us to develop our talents and skills and achieve more good things for us and for those around us in this life and in the future.

Ever since the beginning of his existence, man has been a person foremost above any personality that life has offered. The personality is more important and bigger every day, as the person that incarnates that personality is every day, a more and better person.

I do not like to refer much to the Old Testament. Because of my limited knowledge, I always get into trouble. But I need to mention how, from the beginning of the beginning, God created everything on the earth and placed it at the disposition of man. Genesis says, “The Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, that he might care of and cultivate it” (Genesis 2: 4-9, 15-17). What a great honor! ... But also notice another thing of how, from the beginning, in this same chapter of Genesis, God also placed certain conditions. “You may eat from all the trees of the garden, but the tree of knowledge of good and evil, do not eat, for the day you eat it, you will have to die.”

Within the “freedom” that God himself gives, the man is called to be free, that is, to build his own personality and take responsibility for his actions, to form his way of being, and to acquire a series of values that give meaning to his life.

In order to achieve this, man has to be open to transcendence. And consequently, throughout all their life, man and woman constantly ask themselves several questions regarding their existence: *Where do I come from? ... What is the meaning of my life? ... Where am I going? ...*

It is because of this that the charism of Cursillo simply seeks for the person to know themselves fully, in order that, from their own being, they go about discovering the origin of their existence and might freely arrive at the conviction and decision, **that what gives true meaning to life is to be filled with the gospel of Christ**.

For this, the charism of Cursillo teaches us to believe in our person; in our worth, in our talents, our

potential, and dignity as persons.

It teaches us to respect ourselves and respect others, not for what they have or may give, but because they are human persons, brothers in Christ and living temples of the Holy Spirit.

It teaches us that we are free and we must respect the freedom of any and all around us. That at all times and places, we feel completely free.

This relationship of love and friendship with Christ means and presumes that we live it, and share it, in any **environment** in which we move.

Environment, being not the structures, but in any place where we have a human inter-relationship. It is simply to be that “human being that God wants us to be”, **within the square meter that surrounds us**, 24 hours a day.

Later in the same book of Genesis (2:18-25), God also says: “It is not good for man to be alone, I'm going to make someone like him to help him... And from one of his ribs he made a woman and brought her to the man”...

With this we can see the greatness and the great love with which God created man and woman, that we might live in community. He had always thought for them to live, not isolated, but in community. And of course, I do not think this only refers to the union of man and woman but for all mankind to live in community.

We cannot forget that we all think different and have different qualities and talents, not to compete or make us more than others, but so that we could complement each other and realize the need we have for each other to create the climate for community that gives testimony of the **true meaning of life of being a person**, which is nothing less and nothing more, than **to allow that Christ within us to continuously grow and radiate from every pore of our skin in every moment of our life.**

In the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians 3:16-23, Paul says brothers: “Do you not know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that the Spirit of God lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy and you together are that temple.”

We need to be docile and keep the capacity of wonder like a child, so the Lord can do great things with each one of us. As it says in the Gospel of Mark 10:13-16; “Let the children come to me; do not prevent them for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God as a child, will not enter it”.

Picasso, the great painter also commented one day, “When I was 10 years old, I painted like the best painters of my time. But 50 years had to pass to paint the same way.”

We cannot lose that capacity to wonder that helps us grow, moment to moment, with everything that happens around us. To keep the mind and the heart permanently open to the gospel, to accept people as they are, to realize the way in which their own talents complement us, and to be current each day with the entire reality, gives us the mentality and consequently the criterion necessary to understand and appreciate the greatness of *being a person*, and the meaning *this being* gives to our lives.

John Paul II said to us on April 28, 1983, “It is not sufficient to reflect generously on the love for humanity: we must specifically love he whom the gospel calls neighbor, whom is close to us to whom we grow close”.

In the first rollo of the First Conversations of Cala Figuera on August 20, 1994, Francisco Forteza said to us that “the concept of the person is, without doubt, one of the essential components, if not the primary one, of the foundational thought of Cursillo”. 18 years after that day, we can say **that the person is still, and will continue to be, until the end, the primary component of the charism.**

And to find the true meaning of life, we only need to remember the words of our good friend Eduardo, **“Be faithful to the gospel, attentive to people, and open to reality.”**

De colores,
Juan Ruiz