

# *Approaching Life*

*Using and Leaving*

*Finding out what helps or hinders*

**As everything on the face of the earth exists to help us fulfil our purpose,  
we must appreciate and make use of everything that helps,  
and rid ourselves of anything that is destructive to our living in love in his presence.**

Ignatius of Loyola, Principle and Foundation

Ignatius, in. the **Spiritual Exercises**, talks about “using” or “leaving” all the things that make up our life: material possessions, friends, activities, abilities, natural gifts, thoughts, desires, decisions, and circumstances. They are all gifts. God hates nothing that God has made - and they are all for our use. They need not be an obstacle between God and us

But we do have choices about “using” or “leaving” them - to the extent they help or hinder us in living freely, congruently, relationally. It matters whether I live selfishly or for others, freely or enslaved. It matters whether I am living out of my true self, or not. If I live out of my true self, I experience a certain peace. If I don't, I experience agitation, anxiety and fear.

Perhaps the most important little word in the spiritual life is HOW. Of course it is important to look back and explore what has contributed to who I am: but the really important question is to ask “How am I living now? Is it in such a way that leads to life, or away from life, towards freedom or imprisonment. For the one thing we do know is that we all feel the pain and effect of making destructive or life denying choices.

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Philip Carter is a retired Anglican Priest. He was the inaugural president of the Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction (AECSD). He ran the Julian Centre in Adelaide, an independent and ecumenical centre for spirituality, from 1997-2009.

Contact: [juliancentre@gmail.com](mailto:juliancentre@gmail.com)

**Get in touch with the purpose(s) of your life.**

**Ask yourself what helps or hinders your from living these.**

**If you hear yourself blaming your circumstances, try and move from “out there” to “in here”.**

**Let your feelings reveal underlying (and often hidden) attitudes.**

**We discover the origin of our thoughts and feelings by seeing their orientation.**

**So ask: Where does this thought or feeling lead, or take me?**

**Does it lead to life, peace, a closer sense of God’s presence  
or away from God, and toward more anxiety, lack of peace etc?**

Here is an opportunity to become clearer about “ends” and “means”. If our life is seen in the light of God’s love – God’s purpose for us - “living in love in God’s presence”- then everything else is a **means** to this end. Being rich or poor, having health or being ill, having a long or short life - these are the means to fulfilling our purpose. Yet all too easily we make an end out of one of these means.

*The question before me, now that I  
am old, is not how to be dead,  
which I know from enough practice,  
but how to be alive...*

*Wendell Berry*

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