

## ***“Man's Search for Meaning”***

Viktor Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, describes his experiences in a Nazi concentration camp. As he came off the train into the camp, the guards had some go to right, while others went to the left. Little did he know a life and death decision about them was being made. Those who could do hard manual labor were spared; the rest were being sent to the gas chambers.

He tells that everyone had to surrender all of his or her property—even down to wedding bands. If their clothes and shoes were in too good of condition, they didn't even get those back. They were shaved all over and given showers.

They slept directly on boards in tiers. Nine men would share two blankets. They were fed only 10 1/2 ounces of bread and 1 3/4 pints of thin soup per day—often it was less. Beatings occurred for no reason. They were marched out in the winter cold, without proper clothing, to various work projects. Men were often worked to death.

Stripped of everything we take for granted, with death always hanging over them, Frankl writes, “it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us.” He found that those who had an inner spiritual life, a sense of purpose, and a look to the future were the ones who could cope the best. They were able to avoid losing their humanity. These were the ones who could face death and deprivation with dignity. Frankl observes:

The consciousness of one's inner value is anchored in higher, more spiritual things, and cannot be shaken by camp life. But how many free men, let alone prisoners, possess it?

It may very well be that the greatest thing that God has given us is our sense of purpose in life. Because of our faith, we have inner spiritual reserves that come from prayer and scripture. We want to keep the faith, so that some day the victor's crown of righteousness will be ours (see 2 Timothy 4:6-8). Everything else can be stripped from us, but a sense of meaning can sustain us through the darkest hour.

—Russ Holden