

What Matters In the Light of Eternity:
“Life Matters”
Luke 9:23-27

Dr. J. Howard Olds
June 22, 2008

Living is a thing we do, now or never, which do you? Yesterday is a memory, tomorrow is a mystery, and today is a gift, that's why we call it the present. Jesus said, *“What shall it profit a man to gain whole control and lose his own soul?”* Life, what a wonderful four letter word. Life, what a gift. Life, what an opportunity. Life, what a trust. It is one of those things that matters in the light of eternity. I'd like to take this brief time to share with you my thoughts on living a life that really matters.

GOD-SIZE YOUR DREAMS

Sandy and I were in New York a couple of months ago and managed to see the Broadway Musical South Pacific. A supporting actress in the play has a song that goes, “You gotta have a dream. If you don't have a dream, how you gonna have a dream come true?”

People ask me all the time how I became a minister. I have a serious and a silly answer to that question. The serious answer is that God saw gold worth refining in a lonely country boy's heart and called him to the ministry. The silly answer is that if you spent hot August days with your head against the tin roof of a hay barn you are likely to get a calling to something better.

Randy Pausch is the author of the Last Lecture. He is dying of cancer and he offered his latest lecture as a legacy to his students, wife, and children. In it he tells this story. When I was eight years old, my family made a cross-country trip to see Disneyland. I was in awe of the place. I thought it was the coolest environment I had ever seen. As I stood in line with kids I kept thinking, “I can't wait to make stuff like this.”

Two decades later, Randy got his PHD in computer science and immediately dashed off letters of application to Walt Disney, Inc. As Randy puts it, “They responded with some of the nicest go to hell letters I have ever received. They simply had no place for me in their organization. Here was a company that hired everything from street sweepers to geniuses, but they had no place for me.”

Randy, however, was not finished. “The brick walls are there to give us the chance to show how badly we want something,” says Randy. Randy finally broke

those walls down, got an interview with a Disney executive who agreed to let Randy use his sabbatical on a project of virtual reality. Randy's dream came true.

BUILD FOUNDATIONS UNDER THEM

Henry David Thoreau said it well when he said, "If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost, that is where they should be, and now put foundations under them."

Jesus said there were once two carpenters who went out to build a house. One foolish carpenter built his house on the sand. The wise carpenter built his house on a rock. The construction process went well. Both finished their houses in good time and they looked grand. Then came the storms. The rains fell, the winds blew, the floods rose, and the house on the sand fell down, while the house on the rock stood firm.

What Jesus was trying to say is that appearances can be deceptive. To all, the storms come. Foundations make a difference. Here in simple form we have the story of life. Life requires a firm foundation. Build it on the solid rock of Jesus Christ. It will make all the difference.

Bob and Judy Fisher, in their interview of one hundred four hospice patients, say the soon departed are grateful to be dying slowly rather than suddenly or unexpectedly. Their terminal condition gives them the opportunity to tie up loose ends, to say the things they need to say. It also gives their loved ones the opportunity to close accounts. Life, they realize, is what is happening in the present and they seize the day with all the energies they can muster. For the soon departed, the wonder, excitement and urgent have broken into the present. Are you putting a firm foundation under the castle that is your life? Are you taking care of urgent business? Is your life in order?

LEARN FROM YOUR FAILURES

George Bernard Shaw said, "A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing."

According to a CBS news poll, sixty-four percent of Americans are comfortable with coming up short, but here is the disturbing news. Forty-three percent are content to try only once rather than try, try, again. Ninety-five percent admit that after falling down they now prefer to stay down. Few want to keep going, especially when the going is tough.

Regrets, I've had a few, how about you? I am grateful to family, friends, and churches who encouraged me to get up and try again. I have learned more from my faults and failures than I have from my successes and victories. Some of the things I've learned are these.

Honesty and humility. There is no better cure for an arrogant spirit than a good dose of failure. Life can teach us to be great pretenders, dodging the truth

within and without. Failure will help us get real. It will help us build a life from the inside out rather than the outside in. Failure will help us walk humbly with our God.

How to change. Are you a person who likes to win at any cost? What price will you pay to have it your way? Even if you're right, is it worth the cost? Do you have a flexible attitude?

How to forgive and be forgiven. God invented forgiveness as a remedy to a past that not even he could change. "I was wrong; I am sorry." Do those six words stick in your throat, or cause you to blush? The Bible is so explicit about this business of forgiveness. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." What part of forgiveness don't you understand?

Restoration and release. Are people who falter in the face of some strong temptation damned for all time? Should we label people relational failures because they fail at marriage? Should we throw away the brightest minds in the world because their bodies won't work? In this throwaway society, think of what we are losing by tossing people along the roadside to failure and leaving them to rot.

LIVE THE QUESTIONS

Rainer Rilke writes, "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart, and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue."

It is human nature to ask questions and seek answers. Take a walk with any child and you will be bombarded with questions. Why is the sky blue? Why is the grass green? Where does the sun go when it sets? How do birds know to fly south in the winter?

If you pass that test, there are plenty more to follow. Why did we put granddad in the ground if he went to heaven? My playmate up the street is dying of cancer; does that mean I am going to die? If God is real, why can't I see him?

Life is a quest for answers, answers to problems, answers to diseases, answers to life itself. But in spite of our scientific savvy and technological advancements and communication miracles, the questions remain and even expand.

So, gradually life has taught me to live the questions, instead of seeking the answers. And here's how I do it. By faith – faith is a substance of things to hope for and evidence of things not seen. Some faith is easy. We pray for a miracle and the miracle comes. We pray for a good marriage and a good marriage results. We pray for healthy kids and we have healthy kids, but not all faith is so certain. Some faith is born of trust. When God is silent, no miracles happen, cancer comes back, kids run away, businesses fails; we must trust that God will be with us each step of the way.

By Hope – Emil Brunner says hope is to the soul what oxygen is to the body, absolutely essential. In recent months I have struggles with shortness of breath. Sometime it's a result of anxiety and other times it's a result of fluid building up in my abdomen. Either way it's frightening. In moments like that I reach for hope. I remember that God is closer than the air I breathe and present with every breath I take. It often helps my breathing.

By Love – “...and the greatest of these is love.” You and the Church have taught me how to love and be loved. What can I say? It is the most wonderful thing in all the world to love and to be loved. When love grows into commitment and attainment deepens into acceptance, questions lose their urgency and the fear of life fades.

Life matters. Life matters in the light of eternity. Live it all. Live it now. Live it for the Glory of God and the good of people. Live Life.

Amen.