

Life Moments

It seems the more I work with patients nearing the end of their lives the deeper my conviction that every moment counts toward the final sum of one's life. Living isn't something that ceases when we hear the announcement of a dismal prognosis. Living doesn't stop just because we are too physically challenged to meet the demands of another day's activity. Life continues until the final beat of the heart and the last intake of breath. I believe in challenging a person to continue to reach for opportunities to experience joy, accomplishment, and pleasure until that moment.

The accomplishment may not be monumental, the joy may be fleeting and the pleasure may be shadowed by pain, but all of these experiences can continue for anyone facing death. With the help of people who care and understand the potential of every "life moment", a person facing a terminal illness can continue to find life in each of their remaining days.

Companionship, reflection, music, and creativity can all serve to enhance the lives of those who are facing death. Sharing a familiar activity with a patient, whether it be a fishing trip, going for a drive, baking cookies, or watching a movie together can provide a time of companionship and an opportunity to talk about the past, which may trigger fond remembrances or other



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emotions that may need to be faced in order to find peace. There can also be new "life moments" that bring pleasure or simply a time to relax the mind and body from the emotional and physical stresses of dying.

When physical activity is no longer possible, or the body needs rest but the mind still needs stimulation, the avenues of visual and music therapy can provide continued "life moments" of positive emotional experiences through media selections that offer nostalgia, tranquility, and spiritual retreat.

A real effort to continually seek opportunities to provide just one more "life moment" in which a person can find joy, peace, relaxation or achievement can make the process of dying seem more like a natural part of living as opposed to an abrupt end of hope and expectation. "Life

moments", even small ones, can serve to validate our existence and help to convince us of our value and purpose.

The reward for me is nearly equal to the pleasure I see reflected in each patient's face as they experience, once again, the tug of a fish on a line or the satisfaction of eating a cookie baked from an old family recipe.

I recently had the honor of taking a gentleman on a fishing trip. Together we sat on the bank of a small pond, cast our lines into the water and, as we waited for a nibble, we talked; and we shared life in a way that validated the moment with purpose and pleasant memories. I heard the same stories repeated over and over, and each time he told the story there was "life" in his words and in the tears of joy on his face. For a few hours that day he knew that he meant something to someone and his life had purpose, if only for a little while. He experienced what it meant to LIVE instead of contemplating how to die; it was a "life moment" for both of us. MJ

**FORTUNE
COOKIE**



*Those who do not find
time for exercise will
have to find time for
illness.*

It's time we proud, preoccupied adults learn from the kids

By Rev. Tim Bowling

The events of Sept. 11 surely have changed life in America forever. If for any reason it has not, we are nearly without hope as a nation. Perhaps our children understand what has happened even better than we who are older and have lived so carefree and carelessly for so long, we who have not been too inconvenienced or had to pay too high a price for anything for most all of our years.

Most of us who were born post WWII have no idea or understanding of personal national tragedy. We have lived so many years on a national plateau of security with personal indifference that we don't comprehend our vulnerability anymore.

But kids understand being at the mercy of hands that control far more than they themselves can. Kids know you don't always win; they know that even their very best plans can be thwarted by someone who doesn't want them to have their way and has authority or just plain guts to act against them. Little kids understand parents can "lower the boom," older children understand that parents or law can intervene and peers can exert enough pressure to cause long-lasting effects on a life.

These young people still understand vulnerability. But today's parents and grandparents, those who have had their way paved with too much convenience and cash for so long have forgotten what it is like to be vulnerable.

On Sept. 11, we all became vulnerable once again.

Kids have the tenacity to fight back. They believe in their causes and aren't afraid to take risks to see their way through. There are not many passive kids who will just sit there and "give it up" when they really want something that someone else is trying to take away from them.

Maybe it's time for all of us pompous, proud, preoccupied grown-ups to learn something from our children. If we want this nation to survive, if we want a Christian homeland where there is plenty and freedom is cherished, maybe it is time to become like children.

Maybe when Jesus said "come to me as a child," he was talking about times like this when we are jolted awake to the fact that we are very vulnerable and, short of His Mercy, we too could become a nation manipulated by thugs and forces educated by evil.

It is time to pray! God can heal our land if we will carry it to him like a child with a broken toy and repent of our personal negligence and indifference.

Called To Discipleship - The Life-style of a Disciple

We understand it is Christ who calls us and it is His desire that all should answer His call to discipleship. I hope that you have seriously considered His call in your life and you have given Him your life to rule and reign. For some it may have been a new understanding and personal experience with Jesus, for others, I hope it was the rekindling of a fire that had begun to burn low and is once again stirred and burning stronger. Now I want to begin a discussion of the life-style of a disciple. What considerations and rearrangements may we need to make in our life that will allow us to be effective and a sincere disciple?

First and foremost, we are called to OBEY. If we have made Jesus our Lord as well as Savior we have agreed to an unconditional life of obedience to His teaching and instruction found in His Holy Word, the Bible. It is in this obedience and adherence to his guidelines that we will find true joy and fulfillment in life. Matthew 7:21 says "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father Who is in heaven." and in Luke 6:46 His word says, "Why do you call Me, Lord, Lord, and do not practice what I tell you?" Our world is full of disciples of every kind who have given their lives to all kinds of masters. Every day we see the stories of people who have given their life, sweat and sometimes blood for social and political causes. We rally around their causes with our support often lending them our time, talent and finances without considering it a sacrifice and often, without consulting the Lord as to whether He would have us give ourselves to the cause. Afterall, if we have accepted His call, He is now in charge, He makes the decisions as to where and how we spend our lives. How much more we should rally around the cause of Christ, our commission to do His will and work, with such dedication and joy. But often, to change our life-style, to give our time and resources to our Lord seems like such a sacrifice.

For us to let Jesus decide what and where and when and how we give ourselves to anything rubs us where our pride (flesh) resides. We think we are capable of making those decisions for ourselves. There are many seemingly good causes for us to get involved in but Jesus must always come first. If He is first and He is Lord then as we pray and follow His guidance before entering into "good causes" we will be in the place He has chosen for us and we will be effective and assured that our involvement will produce fruit and not thistles. It is in this kind of submission we truly identify ourselves as disciples and distinguish ourselves from the rest of the world. When Jesus becomes Lord, we allow Him to preside over every area of our life. Our time, talent, resources, actions, involvements, words and thoughts are guided and directed by Him.

There is no such thing as a partial disciple of Jesus Christ. He is a Lord of absolutes. His word says if we are not for Him, we are against Him. . . if we are not obeying and consulting Him as to how we spend our life, then we are disobeying. He said He would spew lukewarm disciples out of His mouth. Being a disciple means more than "coming" and "doing" and being faithful in the church it means every single aspect of our life. . . our family life, our social life, our school life, our neighborliness, our business life, our health and our personal moments are ruled and reigned over by the One who has called us to be His disciple. Jesus expects radical obedience from every disciple. A second aspect of discipleship is a call to SUFFER. Now that is an uncomfortable thought for anyone but look at what the Bible says in Phil.1:29 "For you have been granted the privilege for Christ's sake not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer in His behalf." Jesus gave many warnings concerning this aspect of discipleship as he talked with the disciples who followed Him then. In Matthew 16 he spoke to them and said "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For he who would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. . . Jesus' life ended with rejection, pain, and death and if we are His disciples, we should not be surprised to find hardships and difficulties along the way. Sometimes the pain is dealing with our own pride and comfort in saying no to what our flesh would rather choose or do. Sometimes it is the

remarks of family, friends or business associates who laugh or joke about or commitment and convictions concerning Christ. For many in other countries and now even in our own, it is physical abuse and death because of a decision to make Jesus Lord. Matt. 10:17, 21-22 says, "Be on guard against men; for they will deliver you up to councils and flog you in their synagogues. . . Brother will deliver up brother to death and the father his child; and children will take a stand against their parents and will have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake, but he who perseveres will be saved [from spiritual disease and death in the world to come].

Our suffering and pain may also come in the form of a need to forgive. Many of us have situation in our lives where we need to forgive someone but find it difficult. It was forgiveness that cost Jesus His very life on the cross. Considering what our forgiveness cost Jesus; jeering, joking, discrimination, beating, stabbing and crucifixion, not to mention a broken heart. . . how can we complain and fail to forgive someone else? Forgiveness is a commandment to all disciples. The failure on our part to forgive another will keep us in pain and keep us from experiencing a fully free relationship with Jesus. It will be as a wall built between Him and ourselves. Forgiveness can never cost us what it cost Him. Sometimes our suffering will come in forgiveness. Love is another element of suffering. Jesus made us in His own image and wants us to share in the love He has for us and for the whole world. What grieves Him should grieve us. When we see brothers and sisters in need, we should be His hand extended to meet their need. When we see situation of hate and resentment we should be prompted to pray.

When we know of immorality and sin we are not to look aside just because it is so openly tolerated in today's society. We surely recognize as His disciples that there are absolutes in God's Word and that God does not tolerate all things. In love we are commissioned to warn the world, to tell them the truths that God has given by which all men will be judged in the end. Being bold in love can bring suffering through our having to stand up for what we know to be true. To make our heart care about a sinner, one who our flesh looks upon as less than ourselves, is to take on the heart of Christ and love them in prayer, in confrontation, in a personal witness and testimony of what Christ means to us and an invitation to accept Him too. It may mean sharing the Word with them in Bible study, an invitation and ride to church, or discipleship may mean buying their groceries, watching their children, or mowing their yard. That for most of us is hard and our pride will truly suffer as we are required to speak it out or have to give our time to do menial tasks to show someone Christ, but as disciples it is our responsibility and part of the surrender we made when we answered our Calling from Christ.

The calling from Christ is to Obey, Serve, Suffer and Die if need be. It is and always has been the requirement of all disciples who serve the Lord Jesus Christ. The community of Christians and the body of the Church is not a club where we are entertained, pat each other on the back and fellowship for our own enjoyment. Rather we are a family, an army that individually and collectively has taken on the responsibility of representing Christ to the world. It is not to be done according to how we feel, what we prefer or how we see it but by taking seriously the demands of Jesus through His Word and making them our own demands and pattern for life everyday. We have been chosen by Him, called by Him, bought by Him and by our agreement, belong to Him in every way. We also belong to one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord however, hard or easy that may be. In John 17:18 Jesus spoke this to the Father, " Just as You sent Me into the world. I also have sent them into the world." Just as Jesus came He now sends us. What a commission, what a magnificent calling!



Spring Cleaning the Heart

Spring seems to be a great time for checking our spiritual growth. With all of nature coming alive around us, it is hard not to notice the brush and dried weeds in our own hearts. I spent some time recently just sitting outside watching nature take its course; birds preparing nests, bushes and trees sprouting new leaves, flowers poking through the ground, and I couldn't help but wonder if there wasn't something new wanting to happen inside of me. That is, if I just cleaned house a bit and made room for the sprouts wanting to make their way through all the old of debris lying around. That thought gave way to this observation.

We clean our lawns and cart away the old and spent leaves and grasses from last year. We "spring clean" our homes by clearing away all the hidden dust and grime that has collected in those out of the way places over the season. We plan a garden, we plow and plant and expect a harvest. We plant flowers, bushes and trees wanting to improve the appearance of our property. We study, we plan, we work, we expect from all these exterior areas around us without giving much thought to ourselves and what may be trying to sprout and grow inside of us.

God wants there to be a "spring time" in our hearts. A time when we clear and clean, a time when we plow and plant, a time when we realize a purpose that will produce a harvest if we are attentive and caring of His renewal and refreshing as it grows inside of us.

We would be wise to take time to sit under a tree looking at all that is around us. Just look at the way God "spring cleans" the earth through the seasons. Rain, heat, storms, cold, sun, fire, floods, wind, clouds, darkness, light; they all serve a purpose. God fills life with "spring cleaning" events too. We have storms and clouds of sorrow and sadness, sun and warmth of good times and friends, floods of trouble and floods of blessing, cold and barren times, darkness filled with fear and questions, wind that causes time to pass too fast, bright sun that lights up the future with hope and assurance. But it is our responsibility to clean up the brush and debris and keep the heart clean and receptive to God's will. We are the fields He plants, we are His trees that bud and bloom and produce fruit in the world, our heart is the home He lives in if we invite Him.

Spring gives hope and purpose to the rest of the year. Sit down under that tree and see what God says to you about "spring cleaning". He can see what we fail to acknowledge and He knows where the brush and grime are hiding. Spring is a great time for checking your spiritual pulse just to see if you are growing with signs of budding, blooming and can expect a harvest or do you need to clean out the debris, plow up the heart and plant new spiritual seed. In the presence of nature God can speak clearly. It is His creation and an example to all of us of His plan, His care, His love and His desire to see us grow in Him and Him in us.



What Is Your Passion?

In these past few years, most of my work experience has been with the “mature” generation and it seems that in those experiences I have found two very opposing approaches to aging. Right up-front let me qualify that statement by saying, I understand working with persons of significant age and being that age are totally different “puppies”. I know I am only making an observation and can’t speak from experience but I think this observation is constructive and worth thinking about by most everyone. I have begun to take my observations very seriously and am working on myself and those close to me to be sure we psychologically prepare for the mature years as well as preparing to accept the physical changes that come with age.

Here are the two versions of maturing I see almost daily. First, there is Person One who wakes up one day and says with lowly resignation and disgust, “Look how I’ve aged”. Then there is Person Two who wakes up every day and says with a grand declaration of accomplishment, “Wow, I’m maturing”. These two people look at life in totally different ways. One exclamation says, “Much of life is over for me” and the other says “Life is opening up in new ways for me”. One sees aging as falling off a cliff; the other sees it as a chance to soar. Both end up out in mid-air with no assurances or guarantees, but one plans on going down while the other plans on going up. I think mind set and preparation have at least something to do with the difference. Granted, we have to take what age brings both physically and to a degree mentally, but beginning early to prepare and plan seems to make sense. After all, for all the other stages of life we study, train and prepare, so why is it we fail to plan and set goals for life past the age of 65 or 68 when there is so more life yet to live? Often as much life as another 20 plus years!

In today’s world medicine and healthcare improves our chances of living longer and longer lives and predictably, on the average that is how it will be for most of us. Regrettably, it seems to me that we as a culture have failed to grow society and psychology along at an even pace. Perhaps the biggest obstacle in our way of thinking in this culture is we as a society fail miserably to see the gift of wisdom that maturity produces and we choose not to look to that wisdom when looking for our answers. We certainly need to work on that barrier any way we can, but that is a whole issue in its self. If a person does not look beyond this message our society sends, it is no wonder Person One feels that aging is like falling off a cliff. But Person Two is doing something very differently from Person One that allows them to envision an opportunity to soar and gives meaning to the day when they get up in the morning.

I have decided one of the most important differences I see is “passion”. Person Two has a passion for something. Earlier in their life they cultivated and nurtured an interest in something that carries on through-out a lifetime. They care passionately about their interest. Often I see that passion dealing with a good cause or concern. Sometimes it is a hobby, sometimes it is an interest they never had the time to pursue or develop, but every Person Two has something that gives their life purpose. Not *someone* who gives their life purpose, but *something of their own* that gives them validation and purpose to get up and look forward to even when ailments and inconveniences crowd in on them. Whatever it is, it is important enough to them to devise new ways of carrying on that interest whenever a life limitation presents a challenge. They find a way to remain connected and involved and life continues to have purpose for them.

I still have family and professional responsibilities and ambitions to keep me growing right now but I realize I also need to be cultivating an interest, finding a passion that will be there for me when family life slows down and retirement comes. I need to have a purpose to pursue if life-limiting circumstances should come sooner than expected. For me, this is part of the mind-set and preparation I can do now to make sure I am a Person Two who can get up everyday and say, “Wow, I’m still maturing! My life has purpose and I have a passion for something.”

