

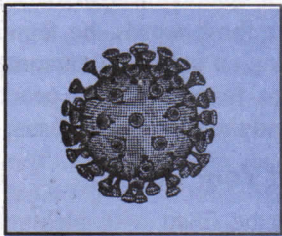


# GOSPEL MINUTES

*The Gospel by Proclamation in Minutes of Meditation*

## Is Life Really Worth Living?

We are now living in a world threatened by the worst pandemic in a hundred years. Thousands are infected with Covid-19 and almost 250,000 Americans have died and around the world millions have succumbed to this strange new disease. Our political process seems to be in disarray, with both sides labeling and challenging the other.



In the midst of this suffering, many people are more and more depressed. Suicide rates are climbing, especially among our teenagers. Thousands of young people take their own lives each year. Suicide ranks among the highest reasons young people die in the United States today. A young man, moments before leaping to his death, pleaded with the police officers, "I wish that someone could convince me that life is worth living."

Why do some conclude that life is NOT worth living? The answer may be physical illness, or the threat of an illness like Covid-19. The answer may be fear of the unknown, not having a clear answer in what direction our country will go and how many will have to die before we get an effective vaccine to this dread disease. Another answer may be frustration with self and/or society. Still others decide life is not worth living due to the loss of a spouse or beloved child or due to loneliness, lack of self-esteem, rejection by others, or just a general lack of personal purpose in life as it now stands.

The negative thinking that leads to the despondent conclusion that life is not worth living is not really the result of circumstances around us. It is the result of what

is within us. Some, with very little, still thank God for what they have. Some, instead of enjoying the great blessing, bemoan the future "which is bound to get worse." Some are crushed by circumstances that others find simply a challenge. As one expressed it, "Life is a grindstone: whether it polishes you or wears you down, depends on the stuff you are made of."

It is not life itself, with the problems that it brings to us, that determines our evaluation of life. We determine whether life is worth living by the way we respond to life's trials. There are four simple rules of life that will help us to attain the serenity, the peace of mind, the happiness that God, our Creator, wants us to have, each and everyone of us.

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## Learn to Depend on God

In the first chapter of the Bible we read, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth....And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them"* (Gen. 1:1, 27). God is our maker, our Designer. *"Make a joyful noise unto Jehovah, all ye lands. Serve Jehovah with gladness: Come before his presence with singing. Know ye that Jehovah, he is God: It is he that hath made us, and we are his; We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, And into his courts with praise: Give thanks unto him, and bless his name. For Jehovah is good; His lovingkindness endureth for ever, And his faithfulness unto all generations"* (Psalm 100:1-5). When we focus on the truth that we are His people and the sheep of His pasture, we must acknowledge the truth written by the prophet. *"O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps"* (Jer. 10-23).

Because God created us, He cares for us. He is concerned about what we do, and what is done to us. David wrote, *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me"* (Psalm 23:4). The promise of the Lord should always abide in our hearts, *"Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"* (Matt. 28:20).

One of the strongest proofs of God's concern for us is the death of His only begotten Son, Jesus, on the cross. *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). When the Christian is beset by problems, his faith causes him to

look to the cross. *"And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose....What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?"* (Rom. 8:28, 31-32). This passage does not say that all things that happen to us are good, but that God can bring good for us out of it. Covid-19 is not a good thing, but it may expand medical science's understanding of viral diseases and how they spread, so that, the next new virus does not become a world wide pandemic, claiming millions of lives. And, if God cares enough to give us His Son to die for us (and He did), then we must realize He will not forsake us now. *"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 4:7). As Paul wrote those words, he found himself in Roman custody, facing an unknown outcome in his trial before Cesar, yet he found an inner peace based on the promises of God and the sacrifice of Jesus.

## Learn to Accept Your Lot

Life is not always going to be filled with pleasant experiences. As Job said, *"Man, that is born of a woman, Is of few days, and full of trouble"* (Job 14:1). God never promised us a trouble-free life. He only promised us the help we need to face and conquer the trials that come our way. It is difficult to accept poverty while others enjoy riches. It is hard to accept illness while others live in good health. But, it is possible! We must learn that things are not usually as good as they seem.

Moses seemingly had every advantage over his brethren among the Israelites. He had access to the palace and riches of Egypt, but he also had a choice to make. *"By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he looked unto the recompense of reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible"* (Heb. 11:24-27). It would appear that Moses made a poor choice. Egypt had riches and military power. Other nations trembled at their might. The children of Israel were in slavery. But, Moses made the right choice. Egypt, with its idolatry and sensuality, would have been the ruin of Moses. With Israel, Moses found the challenge to be the next great leader God wanted.

We need to remember the promises of God that assure us of His blessing when we seek after Him. *"He made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him and find him,*

though he is not far from each one of us....And without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him" (Acts 16:26-27; Heb. 11:6). The apostle Paul had a "thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me" (2 Cor. 12:7). He prayed three times to seek relief from this unknown thorn, but the Lord answered, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9). If Paul could learn to live with adversity so can we learn, use and enjoy our lot in life.

### Learn to Live in the Present

We dare not add to burdens of yesterday and tomorrow to those of today, for the strongest will falter under such a heavy load. Jesus said it in this way, "But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:33-34). If a mother had to wash a stack of dishes that was over one thousand feet high, she would faint before the task she faced. But, the wife and mother of two children washes that much each year! If she had to do it all on January 1, she would give up and throw in the towel. But, one day at a time she can do it.

At the end of each calendar year, my son, David, compiles the index issue for the latest year of **Gospel Minutes**. I marvel at how much writing David and I have done during the year. If I had to face all that on the first day of the year, it would be an insurmountable task. But, I don't have to do it in one day. I live, and work, one day at a time. I only concern myself for the present, not for the past or what might come in the future.

Many of us mope about the past. We have made mistakes, all of us. Others have done things to us, some very unkind or cruel or even illegal things. And, our present is obscured by our memories of the past. The apostle Paul wrote, "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I could not myself yet to have laid hold: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12-14). Paul admits he has not yet achieved perfection, but he kept at it, forgetting the past, good and bad, and stretching forward to the goals ahead in order to serve the Lord as He directed his servant. "Let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience: and having our body washed with pure water, let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not; for he is faithful that prom-

ised" (Heb. 10:22-23). Only when we have that "full assurance of faith" about the future can we effectively deal with and use the present. But, we cannot live in the future, depending on things that might or might not occur. We must learn to live in the reality of now.

### Fulfill God's Purpose for our Lives

When the Lord God made man in His own image (Gen. 1:26-27), it was not a meaningless exercise in creative power. He had a purpose. And man that is made in God's image can never achieve real satisfaction with himself until God is the center of his purpose for living. Solomon recorded his search for life's meaning in the book of Ecclesiastes. Meaningful life was not to be found in pleasure (Eccl. 2:1), in worldly achievements (Eccl. 2:4-6), in wisdom (2:10-11), or in wealth (Eccl. 2:7-9). He then wrote, "This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13).

When Paul wrote, "I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14), he was expressing his purpose in life. Before the birth of Jesus, the angel announced to Joseph, "And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for it is he that shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Jesus lived for that purpose. "For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He died for that purpose. "But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). The only worthwhile life, the happy and fulfilled life, that life that fulfills the purpose which God has for us is a life that serves God to the fullest.

The poet Longfellow, in his *Psalm of Life*, wrote this, "Life is real. Life is earnest, and the grave is not its goal. Dust thou art, to dust returneth, was not spoken of the soul." The great tragedy is that so many live, and die, and never know and fulfill the purpose for which God gave them life. Jesus invites, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29).

Life IS worth living, if it is the right kind of life. Difficulties will come, but Jesus promises to be with us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5). When we depend on Him and work through (with His help) whatever problems come to us, we can live from day to day with the joy and peace that comes only when we fulfill the purpose for which God created us. If you will do that, you will find, in spite of viruses or other threats, that your life is worth living. It will have purpose, "according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11).

- CLEM THURMAN