

Getting the Most Out of Life
August 2, 2015

If you are like most people, you want to get as much out of life as you can. You don't just want to work, sleep, eat, work, sleep, eat, work, sleep, eat. You want fun. You want laughter. You want happiness. You may also want purpose and meaning. We could summarize all of these by saying we want a full life.

As we look at the people around us we see them looking hard for a full life. People are pursuing all kinds of things in their desire for a full life. We see people pursuing physical pleasure. We see people pursuing possessions. We see people pursuing prestige, power, and fame. We see people pursuing busyness. They purposely overload themselves with work, home, hobbies, projects, and more in order to fill every minute of the day with activity. People are searching for a full life in many different ways. And yet how few there seem to be who say they have found such a life. Instead they keep missing something in their efforts.

One of the wisest persons to ever live, King Solomon, describes in the book of Ecclesiastes his own search for a full life. More than most people, he had the power and money to pursue anything he could think of. Through his own pursuits and his observations of others, he came to the conclusion that there is no fullness to be found in any of the things that most people pursue. He did not find fullness in pleasure, in possessions, in building cities and forts and palaces, in gardening, in learning, in education, in amassing money, slaves, or in making a name for himself. He concluded that all such efforts at creating a full life are a waste of time, a chasing after the wind.

At the end of the book of Ecclesiastes he makes this statement...

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (NIV) Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man.

Solomon pursued all that was in his heart to pursue. His search produced no fullness. He was certainly busy. But in none of it did he find fullness. Instead, he found emptiness. He discovered it all to be a waste of time. It was a futile search. He eventually discovered that the only fullness to be had was in a right relationship with God.

The Bible declares that God made us for Himself, not for ourselves. Therefore trying to attain fullness without God will leave our lives empty, not full, no matter how much of life we cram into it.

We see this fullness in the life of Jesus. We see it also in the mission of Jesus. In John's gospel, Jesus makes the following statement.

John 10:10 (NIV) I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

The Greek word *perissos* (full) describes something that goes far beyond what is necessary. Working, sleeping, and eating are necessary. But Jesus wants so much more for us than just what is necessary to sustain life. Jesus wants to give us a full life,

an abundant life. Most other English Bible versions translate this word as abundant. Jesus came to give us abundant life.

One of the great things about spring time is the abundance of flowers in bloom, when the Bradford pear and all the cherry trees are in bloom. It is like that now, now that the Crepe Myrtles are in bloom. Scientists who study bees tell us that when a bee discovers a lot of flowers in one place he flies back to the hive and does a dance to tell the other bees where the flowers are. I imagine that at this time of the year each bee comes in to report this tree that is chock full of flowers and there isn't anyone to tell it to because they have all found such a tree and are busy stripping it of pollen. There is a abundance of flowers.

Jesus wants to give us abundant life. Now you might be thinking, "Well sure, He came to give us eternal life. Eternal means very abundant." I fully believe in the promise of eternal life. But I don't believe that's what Jesus had in mind in John 10:10. I believe this is a different promise from the promise of eternal life. I believe Jesus is speaking about some kind of abundance of life in THIS life, on earth, right now, for His followers.

This is not an abundance of time. Nor is it an abundance of possessions or activities. Let me tell you what I believe He means.

Jesus offers us an abundance of grace.

Ephesians 1:7-8 (NIV) In him (Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us...

Grace is God's favor towards us. It is God smiling down from heaven, wanting to bless your life, not because you deserve it, but simply because He wants to bless you. He gets joy in blessing you. You've heard the expression that it is more blessed to give than to receive? Well that originated with God. God gets great joy out of blessing us. You parents know what this is like. You get great joy in giving things to your kids that they delight in.

Years ago my wife and I made a decision about digital games. We couldn't buy a computer and a game machine. At that time, most of the same games were being produced for both the computer and game machines. We already owned a computer. So we purposely did not buy a game machine. And our sons knew the reasoning behind this.

But after a few years it became apparent that things had changed. The manufacturers were not producing the same games for both machines. And the better games were being produced for the game machines. So one Christmas, we purchased a game machine for the family.

On Christmas day our sons were both shocked and delighted when they opened the package. And it brought my wife and I great joy to give that gift.

That is what God feels when He blesses us. God shows us great grace because it delights Him to do so.

Maybe you did something nice for someone else at some time, something they did not deserve, simply for the joy it gave you to give to them. That is grace. It is what God shows us with every blessing. And those who appreciate His grace get even more blessings. Such are the blessings Jesus wants to give us.

Let me share a couple of things that Jesus wants to give us in abundance by His grace.

Jesus offers us an abundance of peace.

Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV) Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Jesus wants to give you an abundance of peace. This peace is unexplainable. In the midst of bad experiences, Jesus wants to give us peace. But note that this is a conditional peace. It is given when we choose to practice faith in Him and His word. He commands us not to be anxious about anything. You know what that is like. You are anxious about a certain situation and you keep playing it over and over in your mind.

Instead of playing it over and over in your mind, He tells you to take it to Him in prayer. Come before Him with thanksgiving. Focus on the many blessing you have to be thankful for, recognizing that they are all gifts from Him. And then with confidence that He has such love for you, talk out what is bothering you. Talk it out, with faith and thanksgiving, until He gives you an abundance of peace.

Unsaved people, when they are anxious about something, often despair of anything good coming from the situation. Do not be like them. Instead, give this situation to God and receive His unexplainable peace.

Jesus is the perfect illustration of this gift. On the night He was arrested, He spent several hours in prayer. He asked if there was anyway He could avoid the cross. He talked it all through with God. He brought up different options, how it might play through, how tough the next day was going to be. He was anxious about what He was going to have to face.

But in the end, He submitted to the cross, praying, "Not what I want, but what You want." And then we see him face arrest, questioning, insults, beatings, a flogging, and the cross. He does so with courage and peace. He had a great calmness through it all.

That is what you and I need when we are anxious about something. Bring it to God and talk out all your fears and concerns. Talk through the options, the pros and cons. Pray for God's will. Pray and keep on praying until you get the peace of God to face the day ahead.

Jesus offers us an abundance of joy.

John 15:9-11 (NIV) "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed

my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Note that Jesus is going to give us His supernatural joy, an unexplainable joy, a joy that shines out of us even in the middle of troubles. This joy of Jesus, this complete joy is only ours through obedience to Him.

Now note this carefully. You do not get salvation from sin for obedience to Jesus. Salvation from sin is paid for in full by Jesus' death. But an abundance of joy from Jesus IS dependent on your obedience. It is only when you delight in His love that you can really obey Him. And only then can He give you this abundant joy.

Now look at an example of this joy. In Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, he tells them about the church in Macedonia.

2 Corinthians 8:2 (NIV) Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

Here Paul writes about the Macedonian church helping the Corinthians church. The members of this Macedonian church were poor. They were also going through a tough time of trial, probably persecution. And yet they had great joy in Jesus Christ. That joy resulted in a desire to help other Christians financially. They did this even though they did not have much to give.

Jesus can give you a joy that is not dependent on earthly circumstances, but instead is centered on the things of heaven. This joy does not depend on your earthly possessions, but on your heavenly possessions.

The abundant life Jesus came to give us is not an abundance of money or material possessions. The abundance is not an abundance of health. It is not a life of comfort and ease. He does not promise us those things. The full life Jesus wants to give us consists of qualities the world would like to have, but cannot find in its pursuit of earthly things.

Pursue the abundant life that only Jesus can give you.

Invitation:

Jesus said He came to give us abundant life, full life. That starts with righteousness. This abundant life is for His followers, those who have put their faith in His death for the forgiveness of their sins.

All the blessings of God for us start with the gospel. The gospel, which means good news, starts with the bad news. It is the bad news that makes the good news good. The bad news is that we are all sinners against God and in need of a Savior.

The good news is that Jesus is the Savior God sent for us.

Put your faith in the death of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and give your life to Him, and you will be saved.

This is the starting point for the full life we all want, the abundant life God made us for, the full life that Jesus wants to give us.