

January 15, 2023

You Are Ridiculously in Charge of Your LIFE

OVERVIEW OF TODAY'S STUDY

Are you really living the life you long to live? Seriously, take a moment to do an honest assessment. What's working? What's not? What's missing? Are you living out your stated priorities? It is easy for us to get busy and never give any thought to where our life is headed. We can click off days, weeks, months, and even years without really examining our lives and making mid-course adjustments. During this week's lesson we will take steps to ensure that we are leading ourselves well and not squandering the one and only life we will ever have.

GET READY

- ▶ In the book *Your ONE Life* read chapters 1-5 on "Crafting the Life You Long to Live"
- ▶ Read Psalm 90:10-12 and Philippians 3:8-14
- ▶ On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being low and 10 being high), how would you rate your current level of satisfaction with your life? Why did you give yourself that number?
- ▶ Complete the following statement. Someday, I hope to....
- ▶ If your life ended this month, what would you regret?

START HERE

Everybody loves a winner!! Unbelievable effort and resources are poured into creating winners in our culture.

Discussion Question

What are some words that describe what it takes to become an Olympic gold medalist?

If that much effort is poured into creating winners for temporal, fading rewards, then how much more significant is it to invest our efforts in being a spiritual champion.

It is an obvious adrenaline rush to perform in front of a stadium full of people and to have your efforts applauded. How much greater to stand in front of the God of the universe and have him look you in the eye and say “You were a good servant. I am so pleased with you.”

The apostle Paul, a master of word pictures, gives us a very poignant word picture to help us understand how to be spiritual winners in life. He draws his picture from the realm of athletics.

He compares the Christian life to a race. This would immediately conjure visual images of the Isthmian games. They were held every other year on the Isthmus of Corinth and were similar to the Olympic games.

Paul’s primary thought is this: what is true for athletes in a race is true for Christians in the race of life. This requires good self-leadership. The Bible is very clear that we can’t live the Christian life successfully on our own. We need the power of the Holy Spirit, the guidance of God’s Word and the support of other believers.

But you aren’t passive when it comes to your life. You are responsible for your life; you’re the steward of your life. You will someday give an account to God for your one and only life. You have limitless options for what you could do with your life—what you think about, what you spend your time doing, what you spend your money on, what you choose to love, what matters to you, and what decisions you’ll make. It’s easy for us to get distracted and swept along in the current of everyday life. We can click through our days without really taking the time to ask where we’re going and how we’re living.

John Kotter said, “Most people don’t lead their own lives—they accept their lives.” Kotter is saying that rather than exerting good self-leadership, most people get caught up in the current of everyday life and passively get swept along to an unwanted destination.

In the words of Henry Cloud, we are ridiculously in charge of our lives. Others can support, care, encourage, instruct, challenge, rebuke, and mentor us, but we must lead ourselves.

GO DEEPER

The apostle Paul gives us some great instruction on how we can lead ourselves well and craft the life we really long to live.

In Philippians 3:8-14 (NLT), Paul says, Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God’s way of making us right with himself depends on faith. I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and look-

ing forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

1. Focus on life's highest priority

Paul says in v. 8 that everything else in life is worthless compared with the unbelievable privilege of knowing Christ. And, he says that he has jettisoned everything else so that it doesn't distract him and weight him down.

A few years ago, in a London Marathon a man recorded the slowest marathon in history. Lloyd Scott finished in five days, eight hours, twenty-nine minutes and forty-six seconds. Unlike other runners who were wearing running shoes, nylon shorts and a tank top, Lloyd was wearing a deep-sea diver's suit with a heavy metal helmet. What a poignant picture of many of us in the race of the Christian life. We are trudging along, weighted down with a lot of unnecessary baggage.

Discussion Question

What are some things that end up distracting and weighing down Christians living in the 21st century?

In our spiritual journey, we must learn that speed and intimacy do not make good partners. While life is like a race, you cannot develop spiritual intimacy on the run. The pace of life in our culture continues to accelerate, and we are addicted to speed. We cram every hour full and try to do more quicker.

This insatiable need for speed sets us up for a monumental spiritual struggle. Our bodies are over-stimulated, but our souls are undernourished. Speed, hurry, activity, and LIFE drain our souls. It might be true that the pace of life is doing more to shatter our souls than anything else. When you study the life of Jesus you soon discover that he was never in a hurry. Jesus took time and he took his time. One of the things he regularly took time for was time alone with his Father. These carefully guarded moments with his Father were spiritually energizing and replenishing.

Now, here's a truth you can't afford to miss. God speaks in the margins. To hear God and know God you must create space in your life. You must create margin moments in your day when you can, symbolically speaking, sit at the feet of Jesus. These times will not only help you grow, they will replenish and nourish your soul.

There is an old Christian song that captures this point. It says, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace"

Paul knew that the ultimate target in life was a personal, intimate, growing, ongoing relationship with Jesus. When Paul talks about "knowing" Christ, he uses an interesting word. It is the Greek word "gi-

nosko” and means to know by experience. In other words, Paul doesn’t mean “knowing about” Christ, but rather knowing him experientially.

Do you realize that your highest and holiest calling in life is to know Christ?

The goal of life is not just raising good kids.

The goal of life is not to have a million-dollar retirement portfolio.

The goal of life is not to have your own business.

The goal of life is not to travel the world.

The goal of life is not the acquisition of fame.

The goal of life is not even to be a productive worker for Christ.

Jesus said it like this in Matthew 22:37-40 (NLT) *“Jesus replied, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”*

Discussion Question

If you only had a short time to live, how might your relationship with God change?

Maybe one reason there is so much restlessness among Christians is that we aren’t really clear what the goal is. We receive many competing messages. So, we live life with a sense of ambiguity. Just wandering and meandering our way through life, going from one paycheck to the next, one year to the next and not knowing what is the north star of our life.

One reason there is so much pettiness among Christians and in churches is that we have lost sight of our purpose. Petty things become unimportant when people become focused on the purpose of knowing and loving God.

Someone has said “if you don’t know what you’re aiming at, you’ll hit it every time.”

Your highest calling in life is a love relationship with Jesus!!! There is so much to know of Christ. You can spend your whole life pursuing him and never fully comprehend or exhaust all there is to know of him.

In verse 9 Paul talks about the starting line of the Christian life. He says, *“I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God’s law, but I trust Christ to save me. For God’s way of making us right with himself depends on faith.”*

Earlier in this chapter, Paul reviews his very impressive resume. Yet, in v. 9 he says he isn’t counting

on his good deeds for salvation. He is counting on a faith relationship with Christ. And now that he is saved, he is going to spend the rest of his days deepening that relationship with Christ.

Paul elaborates by saying that He also wants to experience the power of Christ's resurrection. Isn't it an awesome thought to imagine the dynamite power that raised Jesus from the dead activated in your everyday life?

As we come to know Christ and are conformed to his image, his power is released in us. That is what it means to walk in the Spirit.

Most of us would read the first part of verse 10 and say, "Sign me up!."

But Paul isn't finished. In the last part of verse 10 he states, "*I want to know him in the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.*"

Paul knew that there were many things he could not learn about Christ except through pain. We want the power but spare us the pain. Maybe we need to embrace the old saying "No pain, no gain."

One of the most critical means of deeply knowing Christ is through the regular, authentic practice of spiritual disciplines.

It is important to be very clear about the "why" of spiritual practices/disciplines. When we became Christ followers, most of us were taught about the importance of spiritual disciplines and spending time with God. Many of us were taught to have a daily "quiet time" where we would spend time in prayer and God's Word. But usually, we don't really give much thought to the goal or desired result. We just know that good Christians have a regular "quiet time."

"Spiritual disciplines are like garden tools." They prepare the soil and remove the impediments so that the soil of our souls is in a place where God can shape and refine us into the likeness of Jesus. In other words, we don't measure our spirituality by how many times this week we had our quiet time. Rather, the measuring stick is the slow, incremental progress toward Christlikeness.

Paul says it like this in 1 Timothy, "*train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*" 1 Timothy 4:7b-8 NIV

The goal of the Christian life isn't to become an expert in spiritual practices or become knowledgeable about the Bible. The goal is to become like Jesus.

There are two tracks on which spiritual transformation runs. Sustained spiritual growth requires both HABIT AND HEART. It takes consistent spiritual practices and genuine heart desire for true spiritual growth to take place. Spiritual practices (habits) without heart lead to hypocrisy and legalism. Think Pharisees. On the other hand, heart without habit leads to inconsistent growth and dependence on shallow emotionalism. It is in the convergence of heart and habit where true spiritual transformation takes place.

LIVE IT OUT

So, what would it look like for you to be more focused in your pursuit of knowing God? What do you do now that helps you to stay connected to Jesus? (See John 15:5-8). The point of spiritual disciplines is to help you know Christ better, not simply fulfill a spiritual obligation. What new spiritual discipline might you engage to help you know Jesus more intimately? (Unhurried prayer, fasting, silence, solitude, personal retreat, memorizing scripture, meditating on Scripture, or practicing Sabbath.)

2. Develop a holy discontent

As Paul moves to verse 12 and the first part of verse 13, he says, *“I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. No, dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be...”*

Now, this is the apostle Paul talking. He is one of the greatest Christians to ever walk this planet. It would have been easy for Paul, after having been a Christian 30 years and looking at all his accomplishments, to just sit back and coast. And, yet his honest confession is “I haven’t arrived.” “I’m not satisfied.” It is so refreshing for someone like Paul to honestly confess “I don’t live perfectly. I still struggle.”

Discussion Question

When you think about your life, is there some area where you have stopped growing and started coasting?

It is doubtful that any of us would look at our lives and conclude “Well, I’ve experienced all there is of life, and I’ve gone about as far as I can in my Christian life.”

NO! That wouldn’t be our attitude. Paul recognized that he was still in “process”—And we are still in the process of “knowing Christ.”

Too many Christ followers get complacent and stop growing. Make it your ambition to “finish well” and stay faithful until the very last day of your journey.

Discussion Question

When you think about finishing well, what does that look like for you personally?

Acts 20:24 (NIV) says, *“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”*

So, Paul focused on life’s highest priority, and he refused to just coast and be satisfied with where he was. He had a holy discontent.

3. Leave behind the past

In v. 13-14 Paul says, *“but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven.”*

“Forgetting the past”—We need to have a biblical understanding of the word “forget.” It doesn’t mean to do some kind of mental gymnastics to erase it from your memory banks. It means to no longer be influenced by or affected by the past.

Many people live their lives always looking in the rearview mirror.

Some of the unhappiest people we know live life always looking over their shoulder at past disappointments and regrets.

Discussion Question

What are some common things that keep people tied to the past?

For many believers, they are in bondage to their past.

With God’s help, we can get past our past!! We have a response-ability—we cannot blame circumstances, family background, failures, and the hurtful actions of others. By the power of God in my life, I can choose to not be held hostage to my past.

Take encouragement today from Paul’s words. He had some really dark things in his past, and yet by God’s grace, he found forgiveness and the ability to move forward.

4. Lunge into the future

He not only forgets what lies behind, but he also looks forward to what lies ahead and strains to reach the end of the race.

Paul probably has in mind the picture of the chariot races. Imagine a close chariot race and the driver leaning forward and straining with every fiber of his being to win.

Clarence Jordan puts that dream into words when he says “It is difficult to be indifferent to a wide-awake Christian, a real live person of God. It is even more difficult to be indifferent to a whole body of Christians like this.”

The truth is none of us know for sure how much more time we have on this earth. There are no guarantees. It could be 30 days or 30 months... maybe 30 years. But whatever days you have left, they are a gift from God. Don't take them from granted. Lean into your future and begin to craft the life you long to live.

Discussion Questions

As you think about your future, what excites you? These days, what purpose are you living for?

A.W. Tozer says it like this: People who are passionately committed to God

- are facing only one direction
- can never turn back
- no longer have plans of their own

And the great news is that it is never too late to start living for God's purposes. Declare a new day and a new way of living. Start now! There's an old Chinese proverb that says, “The best day to plant an oak tree was twenty years ago. The second-best day is today.”

LIVE IT OUT

One way to bring focus and greater purpose to your life is to write out a Life Purpose Statement. In Lance's book *Your ONE Life*, there is an exercise to help guide you through crafting your own life purpose statement (p.61-66). It can sound daunting to create a statement that captures the purpose of my entire life. But it can be incredibly fulfilling and clarifying. Give it a shot. You'll be glad you did.