

Otherworldliness

A Companion and Epilogue to *Staking Your Life*

Otherworldliness. Is that even a real word? My spell-checker says, “yes.” I’ve never used the term before, but it occurred to me that this is exactly what Christian believers should be focusing on. Believers hate the thought of being described as *worldly*. We like the terms *spiritual* or *sanctified* as we go about serving the Lord in this world. The question is, do we actually live like it?

Life! What a marvelous gift we’ve been given—to live on this earth X number of years with the chance to pursue and achieve our dreams, all the while enjoying the penetrating beauty of this natural world as a backdrop. Now, in practical terms, we do not all share a level playing field. Many, the majority of people, I fear, are born into a world of dismal poverty where opportunity is so limited that they are destined for an existence of mediocrity, largely overlooked, invisible to the likes of us who have been ushered into a life of meaningful prospects.

Whether silver-spooned or raised a little less glamorously, privileged lives offer a bedrock of promise, where people have been furnished with the capability to advance. This is the hallmark of Western Culture and those who emulate it, a richness not only of material wealth, but also the prospect of longevity, providing us the resources to achieve things more or less unreachable by previous generations.

And many take full advantage. Through drive, education, and generational wealth, people of today possess the opportunity of achieving astounding success. These folks are paraded before us as the epitome of a life well-lived. We pin our hopes on ultimately becoming more like them, to one degree or another, hoping to experience the self-worth we instinctively know they must possess. Isn’t this true? Are we not constantly presented with a verbal eulogy of these lives in the news? “So and so lived to the ripe old age of 100, here is a list of his or her achievements. What a life of honor; what a life well-lived!”

And then there are those billionaires who are pouring their resources into longevity, hoping to extend their lives, sometimes even with the goal of living indefinitely. Why they would even desire such a thing is beyond me. At the risk of being a bit morbid, now in my later years I’m less and less enamored with the prospects of life on this earth, no matter how fulfilling, lucrative and rewarding it might appear to be. I guess their quest boils down to *fear*. In portraying the ultimate freedom of the follower of Christ, a life truly well-lived, the writer of the Book of Hebrews affirms in verse 2:15: “and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.” What we once were in this world, in Christ we no longer are.

“Slavery” is indeed appropriate to the subject of a life unavoidably ending in death. The common denominator of all who live on earth is inescapable—eventual *death*. We are all going to die, and we all know it, together bearing an inherent sense of bondage. Those who are still young are least aware of what life here ultimately holds. They think they have time! Watching the carefree goings-on of her twenty and thirty-something year old grandchildren, my wife’s 99-year-old mother (daily undergoing the rigors of old age) recently uttered this statement: “somebody needs to tell them!”

Tell them? Really? Somewhat oblivious to the more than obvious future lying ahead for each and every one of them, they would merely have brushed it off as an unpleasant thought—a remote and distant reality, “I know, I know, but that’s a long way off. Why worry about it now?”

And I can see their point. Life can be a wonderful thing. The chance to live all that can be experienced through our natural senses—to be able to see, hear, feel, taste and smell the feast that is set before us offers a sensual distraction most live their lives for. It’s what happiness seems to be all about. Is it any wonder that the notion of God and a life hereafter so easily get shoved into the background? “Why focus on something I can’t see when so much of what I can lies right here before me?”

We hear a lot about “The triumph of the human spirit.” What is that, exactly, but a clinging to life in this world—an insistence and perseverance in taking all this earthly life has to offer. But whether long life or not so long, termination is on the horizon. Shouldn’t we all, young or old, in some way be making ready for it? It’s not just the suffering of old age we should be preparing for, but death itself. As the climax of life, death ushers in a whole new set of experiences. Some would have us believe that when the plug of life is inevitably pulled our being simply ceases to exist. But as every one of us will one day discover, it’s simply not true: We live on into eternity!

The Bible clearly portrays this reality. It is indeed pertinent to worldly people, but make no mistake about it, this mindset is an issue for believers as well as nonbelievers. As followers of Christ, we are constantly being drawn away to the abundance this world has to offer. Our enemy cleverly uses this ploy, tempting us to believe that there is ultimately something here which will fulfill our human needs. Throughout the Bible God offers us a solution to this dilemma, if indeed we will heed it—if we will believe Him as opposed to what our natural senses tell us.

One of the most debilitating impediments to spiritual growth after coming to know Christ is not knowing who we really are in him. It can lead to spiritual lethargy. In Hosea 4:6 we find a disturbing truth: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” While the context of this prophetic message concerns the Israelite’s failure to obey and pursue God, it carries great significance for us as Christians today.

Do you know who you are in Christ? Why are you here; is there a purpose to your life? Some dig deep into these questions. But many others, for one reason or another, do not even bother to ask them.

The result of this crippling “lack of knowledge” among believers is a superficiality in their relationship with God. A paradigm has arisen in the Church concerning the issue of God’s purpose for our existence. A paradigm? What is a paradigm? *Webster’s* defines it as a model for something that may be copied: an example or pattern—a presumed truth we intuitively believe; something we bank on. We are surrounded by paradigms in life. But the paradigm of God’s true purpose for us is the most essential of all; it is fundamental to our life in Christ.

What, then, is God’s purpose in creating us as He has? Eternity in heaven, of course, but what about our life here on earth while we await that eventuality. Probably the most common paradigm among Christians is the belief that God wants us to surrender our lives to him, receive the salvation he has freely provided by his atonement through the cross, and then live for him enjoying all the spiritual and material blessings he has bought and paid for—all encompassed in his free gift of grace. Certainly sounds like a wonderful life, doesn’t it? And it is; one so easy to

focus our minds on. But this view of God's purpose often results merely in setting our heart on a great life here with the expectation of eternal life later as some sort of fringe benefit.

What's wrong with that, you may ask? The issue lies in the fact that it leads to an emphasis on *blessings* here and now—both spiritual and material—instead of what Jesus truly designed us for. Consider the words of the apostle Paul found in 2 Corinthians 4:16 – 18:

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying,
yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of
glory far beyond all comparison.

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which
are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things
which are not seen are eternal."

And once more in Colossians 3:1 – 4:

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things
above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your mind on the things above, and not on the things that are on
earth.

For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed
with Him in glory.

Jesus Himself warns about the pursuit of worldly wealth and success, saying:

Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust
destroy, and where thieves break in and steal;

But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth
nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal;

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

(Matthew 6:19 – 21, part of His foundational teachings found in the Sermon on the Mount)

What we really need is a paradigm shift, an overhaul of our belief system—one even more consequential than Copernicus' contention that the earth revolves around the sun rather than the other way around. How could anything be more dramatic than that, you may ask? Well, in fact the reason God created us—the purpose for our being—is just that! He created us for eternal relationship with himself, and therefore everything in our lives should be centered on that purpose, here and now. Our joining with him, now and eternally, outweighs everything else. Focusing on our relationship with Christ is primary, while any blessings we ultimately enjoy while here—and there will be many—are merely fringe benefits.

The entire issue is wrapped around the question not of *how* but *why* God created us in the first place. Was it a whim, or does this universe reveal stunning intent on God's part? Colossians 1:16 clearly states, "For by Him (Jesus) all things were created...all things have been created through Him and for Him." God wants *you*; He wants *all of you*. Yes, as His very own possession: "You are not your own; you have been bought with a price..." (1 Corinthians 6:19 – 20).

A criticism leveled against those who dare to live out God's exalted purpose is, "You shouldn't be so heavenly minded that you are no earthly good." But this is unfair, because unless we attempt to live in pursuit of God's true purpose—to actually live for Him alone—we have little hope of any meaningful success while on this earth. All fine and good, you, may be thinking, but where and how can such a life-changing revolution actually begin? Where do we start?

When attempting to change we must first identify the problem. It starts with recognizing and understanding the issue. Have you contemplated what eternity looks like? Most often people think of heaven as some sort of enhanced experience of the best things we have here on earth: Sumptuous feasts (eat all you want and never get fat), mansions (didn't Jesus Himself give us that idea? No, He actually said "dwelling places"), amazing golf courses, unlimited travel events. And the list goes on—you name it—all resulting from a misunderstanding of God's true intent.

God created us for Himself. His whole purpose revolves around calling a people to Himself, joining us to Himself for eternity, "conforming us to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). Until we come to an understanding of God's purpose for His creation we are doomed to an earthly life of partial fulfillment as we await our true home. Instead, seeing ourselves as sojourners here on earth while pursuing Jesus with every fiber of our being is what God has designed for the life we are honored to live here:

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:20 – 21)

How then should we live? What defines a successful life? A life truly well-lived is one that elevates the otherworldly life over any human pleasures and accomplishments, no matter how exceptional they may be. Pursue Jesus and He will respond by revealing Himself to you. Praying In Colossians 1:9 – 12, Paul exhorts us to, "Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." We all want to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant" as we enter the rest of our eternal home.

Now I could go on quoting Scripture, filling pages with information on this subject. But isn't that what the Bible is for? The Bible is the blueprint, the user's manual for our life in Christ while here on earth. Spend time in it, yet not for the sole purpose of gaining knowledge of particulars. Our relationship must not be just with the Bible but with the God of the whom the Bible speaks, He whose person and purpose are revealed therein. Get to know Him intimately; this is the key to discovering the truths of God impossible to convey with words.

A final thought: Most of us have heard the exhortation, "It's not about you, It's about Him." How true, but I would like to explore something critically important. "It's not about you, it's about *us*." This may sound a bit self-centered until we understand who "*Us*" truly is: The Lord Jesus Christ as the head of the worldwide body of believers, past, present and future—He and His children who are to all share everlasting life together. This is the culmination of the purpose and plan God has for all He has so lovingly created.