

Building a Life that Really Matters: An Invitation
Matthew 19:16-26

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What is Life? I've asked that question a 1000 times these past few weeks. Maybe you have asked it, too. To discover life's true meaning and pursue life's ultimate purpose is the task of every person on earth. So it comes as no surprise to us that a bright, young, successful, businessman should ask Jesus to show him life, real life, a life that really matters.

Life is ...well, how would you define it? Forrest Gump said, "Life is like a box of chocolates; you never know what you are going to get." Some say, "Life is a roller coaster ride. It picks you up, slams you down, jerks you around and brings you back to where you started." My father-in-law used to say, "Life is like a mountain railroad with an engineer that's brave. We must make the run successful from the cradle to the grave." I often say, "Life is like an ice cream cone; the moment you think you have it licked, it drips on you." How would you define life?

The Bible has a lot to say about life. It has some lessons that all of us ought to learn. The Bible says LIFE IS A TRUST, a loan from God.

I used to say life is a gift, a pure and simple gift, but gifts can be abused with no accountability or ignored without responsibility. Life is not like that. While life is not earned, it is meant to be answered.

Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted his property to them."

The dictionary defines trust as an arrangement whereby property legally owned by one person is administered for the benefit of another. Some of you establish trust funds for your children. We are all living off a trust fund from God.

Oh, I know, sometimes we like to talk about me, about my, about I earned this and I own that, here's my house, and these are my children, there's my car. But before we go too far we best remember we came into this world with nothing but a cry and we will leave this world with nothing but a whimper. Life is a trust, a loan from God.

LIFE IS A TEACHER. There are some things we ought to learn in the few years we are here.

Some of us are enrolled in the school of hard knocks. None of us graduate from the university of life. Life is an art you learn as you go. There are some things this bright, successful, young man has learned from life and some things he still needs to know. You can hear it in the questions that he asked Jesus that day.

Riches will never make you happy. Things will never satisfy your soul. Since 1957 average Americans are about twice as rich and half as happy, say the polls. David Myers writes in his book, The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty, “We have espresso coffee, the World Wide Web, SUV's and caller ID, but we also have more depression, more fragile relationships, less community and more violent and suicidal teens. We excel at making a living but often fail at making a life.

Don't get me wrong, it is easier to live with money than to live without it. Let us beware that yesterday's luxuries become today's necessities and tomorrow's relics. While we rejoice in the things that money can buy, are we conscious of the needs that things cannot supply? God and God alone makes all things possible!

Keeping the rules alone will not bring joy in life. The rich young ruler asked, “What must I do to earn eternal life?” Jesus says, “Keep the commandments.” Rather than giving him all 613, he gave him only the last of the “Big 10.” And the young man said, “*All these I have kept, what do I still lack?*” Do you hear the hunger in that question?

It's hard to knock ethics in an age of moral chaos, but some of you know what this man felt. You have played by the rules, walked the straight and narrow, kept your nose clean, until now you are beginning to wonder, “What lack I yet?”

To quote our founder, John Wesley, “Many of us are almost Christians with a sense of right and wrong, of truth and justice, and a set of common virtues. What we need to be is altogether Christians who love God and love others, and practice our faith in a way that is pleasing to God.” Life is a teacher; it gives us questions that need to be asked.

LIFE IS A TEMPORARY ASSIGNMENT.

‘Time, like an ever rolling stream, bears all who breathe away,’ we sing in the hymn. “*Mortals are like grass,*” says Isaiah, “*and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall. Surely people are like grass.*” “*What is your life?*” asked James. “*You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*”

What part of temporary can't we understand? Life is a temporary assignment. Don't get too attached to what is around you. Don't get too fixed on this world. We are never completely happy here because we are not supposed to be. I can't tell you how many times I've planned my life, set my securities, tried to settle down, only to have the foundations shaken, the plans torn to shreds, and the future become uncertain. When I ask, “Why?” the Lord says patiently, ‘Howard, how many times do I need to remind you this world is not your home. Trust me.’ “*I know the plans I have for you. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*”

What is life? Life is a trust, a teacher, a temporary assignment.

HOW CAN WE LIVE A LIFE THAT REALLY MATTERS? Isn't that the question on this young, successful, businessman's mind?

A life that really matters is a FOCUSED life.

We are busy people. We have places to go and things to do, people to see. We wear our busyness like badges. We are proud of it. We even greet our friends with words like, "I know you are busy." Life is more than keeping busy. Is that all there is? Just staying busy? Most of us live lives of aimless distraction while we are called to live lives of meaningful purpose.

A meaningful life is a focused life. It knows how to set priorities and choose among the many things that call for our attention day after day, week after week. Stephen Covey, a few years ago, set the world aflame with a book called the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. The third habit Covey suggests is put first things first.

Our lives, said Covey, can be divided into four quadrants. The first quadrant is the Urgent and Important: a crisis is urgent and important. Bad news from the doctor is urgent and important. The second quadrant is Not Urgent but Important: here lies our religious faith and relationships. A third quadrant contains the Urgent and Unimportant: here are phone calls and some meetings. Finally there is a quadrant of our lives containing the Non-urgent and the Unimportant: such as trivia, busy work, time wasters.

According to Covey, the most neglected quadrant of our lives is the Non-urgent but Important. Our religion does not seem as urgent as a ballgame. Is it not more important? Do we not take our relationships for granted until some crisis calls them to urgency? In the clutter of things to do, what priority are you willing to place on your faith and your significant relationships? Jesus said long before Covey, "*Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.*" A life that really matters is a focused life. It knows how to set priorities.

A life that really matters is a FRUITFUL LIFE.

Jesus said, "*If anyone abides in me and I in him, they will bear much fruit.*" The key word is abide: remain, linger, tarry, stay there.

I got out of my chair of self-pity long enough this week to take my grandson fishing. He got a rod and reel for his fourth birthday, and of course, being the genius that he is, he immediately mastered the art of casting. As I sat in that little john boat with my son and grandson beside me seeing the deer on the shore and the ducks on the lake through the eyes of a four-year-old, I took a deep breath

and thought, “This is really living.” Then I thought how my father-in-law had taught my son and me to fish on that same little lake. I thought how we had often sat along the shore discussing the riddles of life and how hard it was to understand much of what happens in the turn of a day. That is what I mean by bearing fruit.

Fruitfulness is more *being* than *doing*. We are forever doing things. We need to be productive—build buildings, accomplish goals, meet deadlines; we ought to do something with our lives while we are here. But there is another side of it all that we often forget and neglect. It is that trees just stand there soaking up the sun and absorbing the rain to bear fruit in God’s good time. Fruitfulness is more about abiding than accomplishing.

Fruitfulness is more about trust than it is control. Paul said, “*The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*” Against these there are no laws; just do them. A seed will never grow if we pull it out of the ground daily to check its progress. It doesn’t need our knowledge of germination to germinate. It just grows and bears fruit. Maybe we don’t need to know what is happening. Maybe we just need to trust the process. It was J.C. Penney who once said, “The wisest decision I ever made was to let go.” A life that really matters is a fruitful life. The rich young ruler had trouble with that. He couldn’t let go.

A life that really matters is a FAITHFUL LIFE.

“Come, follow me,” said Jesus. But for the rich young man, the price was too high; the cost was too much. He went away sad. What are you going to do?

I worked so hard for Jesus, I often boast and say,
I sacrificed a lot of things to walk the narrow way.
I gave up fame and fortune, I’m worth a lot to thee,
And then I heard him gently say to me:
I left my home in glory and counted it but loss.
My hands were nailed in anger upon a cruel cross.
Be faithful weary pilgrim, the morning I can see.
Just take your cross and follow close to me.

George Bernard Shaw once said, “Life is no brief candle to me. It is sort of a splendid torch which I have gotten to hold for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.” It’s not great starters, it’s great finishers who line the halls of faith. I want to finish well. Don’t you?

How about it? Would you like to build a life that really matters? As I sat in my office a few weeks ago, watching the construction on our campus, a thought came to me that I believe to be from God. Even as we build new buildings, why not invite people to build new lives that are pleasing to God and helpful to others.

Even as a new building will make a difference, why not build new lives that will make a difference? So, I invite you today to live a purpose-driven life. I ask you to enter a 40-day covenant with God to do five things:

1. Put God first.
2. Spend 30 minutes a day in reflection and prayer.
3. Do a kind and unselfish deed daily.
4. Attend worship weekly.
5. Tithe your income.

This is not a program or a promotion. This is about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This can transform your life. It is going with Him all the way.

We will give you a Builder's Devotional Guide if you like, and offer you a construction crew to build along with you. Why not build a life that really matters? Well, why not?

Let us pray.

You have created us in Your image and called us Your children. While we stray and wander from Your ways, You never forget our names nor our reason for being. In the stillness of this place, O Lord, come speak to us in the depths of our hearts and help us be Your people. Amen.