

The true measure of a person's life is not the duration but the donation. *Peter Marshall*

Over the past two weeks, I've had the privilege of walking w/ two families who've lost loved ones into eternity. While both men lived well into their 80's, what was special about them was the amazing donation of their lives.

Mr. Bill Fountain was an extraordinary man who had as deep a love for his wife and family of anyone I've ever met – and he loved me. As I listened about his life last Saturday, I was struck by how much of a generous, overachiever he was and how he lived each moment to its fullest always seeking to put a smile on God's face. His life touched 100's of people.

Then yesterday, I learned about Dr. Elton Johnson Jr., a pastor/missionary to Brazil whose life was a great adventure for Jesus. All he knew was **GO** – and his direction was set for Jesus. Even into his 80's, he was traveling to Brazil to preach the Gospel where 1000's gave their lives to Christ.

When I think of these men, whose lives appear so different, the truth is they were quite similar as they lived each day seeking to honor the Savior holding nothing back. They gave life all they had leaving nothing in gas tank.

When I wrestled back in high school – during the state finals, a fellow wrestler said – *leave it all on the mat!* In other words, give it all you’ve got and hold nothing back. My grandfather said the same thing in different words – he’d say, “*You only get out of life what you put into it.*”

As we approach **Acts 20:17-38** this AM, we find another man who gave it all he had – who fought the good fight.

*From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them: “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord w/ great humility and w/ tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. You know I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the H.S. warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. **However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.** “Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will*

of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the H.S. has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought w/ his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for (3) years I never stopped warning each of you night and day w/ tears. “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ”

When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down w/ all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship. Acts 20:17-38

The Apostle Paul is nearing the end of his ministry and he knows it b/c the H.S. has revealed it him. Yet as he boards a boat for Jerusalem, he asks to meet w/ the leaders at Ephesus who were near/dear to his heart for one final time. And this is the message he shares w/ them. In this wonderful encouragement, **I want you note verse 24.**

I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

Paul was saying to live was Christ and to die was gain. He was saying that if there is anything worth denying yourself and dropping your nets – it was taking up the cross and following Jesus.

I found it “God-ronic” that this verse we’re studying today just happened to be the life verse for Dr. Elton.

This verse begs the question – what drives/motivates you? What makes you tick? For Paul, he was compelled by the Gospel – and his personal encounter w/ Jesus. Thus, his sole ambition in life was to help others experience the same love and grace he had experienced. He was compelled by the God’s love for him. Read **2 Corinthians 5:14-21**.

For Christ’s love compels me, b/c I am convinced one died for all, and therefore we’ve all died. And Jesus died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave

us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:13-21

I What COMPELS You?

Paul was captivated by the very love that engulfed him on the road to Damascus and transformed his life.

II How CONVINCED of Jesus are You?

He was convinced that Jesus was who He said He was and did what He said He'd do.

III Are you CONVICTED Only Jesus Can Change Lives?

B/c of where he'd come from, Paul understood that only the cross can take the dead and give it life, make the lost found, and give hope to the hopeless.

IV Are You COMMITTED to the Call?

An ambassador is a person who represents his home nation while living in a foreign land. As believers, we're called to live on earth representing our home in heaven w/ the message of God's love/grace.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Which begs the question – What compels you? The donation of your life will be determined by the focus of your purpose.

A Option 1 – ME First

This option puts *self* on the throne and seeks to make sure *self* is loved and nurtured before anyone/anything else. This is the nature of our flesh. We live in a culture where self is the predominant characteristic of our day. Me-ism has become the prevailing spirit!

Do you remember the rich farmer Jesus spoke about in Luke 12 – he opted for Me-ism. In his abundance, he built bigger barns, filled them full of his harvest, and then leaned back to enjoy his blessings. If you were to count the personal pronouns in this parable and you'd sense Me-ism squeezing life/eternity from a man who thought he had it made.

B Option 2 – The PAST Rules

Some people choose to live in the past. Not selfishness but escape is the driving motive of their lives. The word nostalgia comes from two Greek words: **NOSTOS** – *to return home* and **ALGIA** – *to a painful condition*.

The term was first used of Swiss mercenary soldiers who became despondent while fighting in foreign lands. When they remembered the Alps and the calmer periods of their lives, they got the blues. They became nostalgic.

Some people live w/ a permanent case of nostalgia. They long for the good old days. They project their minds into a bygone era when things were calmer and life was better. But I think Will Rogers spoke into nostalgia the best – **Things ain't what they used to be and probably never was.**

C Option 3 – WIN No Matter the Cost

For some, life is all about winning and the desire to succeed is what drives them. Lombardi used to say – ***Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing.*** This attitude is pervasive all around us. Just look at the money being thrown around in sports today. But what if, like Jesus taught, **life isn't about being the best but doing your best.** See ***Colossians 3:17***

D Option 4 – MORE is Better

We can make the accumulation of wealth our purpose. Gold is god. The bank is the altar. And stuff is the priority.

The worst thing about money is it costs too much! John D. Rockefeller put it like this – *The most miserable man in the world is the man who has nothing but money.* One man put it like this – *Money may be the husk of many things, but not the kernel. It brings you food, but not an appetite; medicine, but not health; acquaintances, but not friends; servants, but not loyalty; days of joy, but not peace of happiness.*

To those who live for money come the sobering reminder from the rabbi from Galilee, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”

E Option 5 – FOLLOW Jesus

I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.