

MAKING LIFE COUNT

Maybe you've seen the movie Mr. Holland's Opus. It's a movie about an aspiring composer named Glen Holland. His dream is to compose a great symphony. He ends up taking a job as a high school band teacher to pay the bills. His real passion isn't teaching. He keeps trying to get back to his passion but life has a way of edging out our dreams, and he spends the 35 years teaching high school band, never finishing his symphony. When he retires, all of his former students gather together to honour their high school music teacher. One of his former students who is now a governor, takes the podium she says, "We are your symphony, Mr. Holland. We are the melodies and notes of your opus. We are the music of your life." Glen Holland learned to multiply his influence through other people.

2 Timothy 2:1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. 3 Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No-one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs - he wants to please his commanding officer. 5 Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. 6 The hard working farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. 7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

A few months ago we went to Disney World. When you enter Epcot there is a place where you can "leave a legacy". That means that they take a picture of you and then engrave your face into the stones at the entrance. In your Christian life are you leaving a legacy? Not your picture in stone but your life replicated in the life of someone else? We all want the world to be a better place because of us.

In 2 Timothy we see that the Apostle Paul is now an old man. He knows that his time on earth is short. As he reflects on his life he tells Timothy that there are several things that he needs to remember if he is going to make his life count – if he is truly going to “leave a legacy” and be used by God to make a lasting difference in the world. He says that there are 4 priorities:

1. DON'T FORGET TO MAKE DISCIPLES – raise up your successors

In the Great Commission Jesus gave us only one command and that was to make disciples. That means that you take what you have learned of Christ and you share it with others in an intentional way who will then share Christ with others. Discipleship is not something that is reserved for pastors or elders. It is something that all of us are called to do. It is a natural and normal part of the Christian life. If you are not discipling someone than something is wrong with your spiritual life.

Heb 5:12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

God expects all of us to be teachers. This does not mean that we all preach and have the gift of teaching. This just means that we are all able to share what we have learned with others. So who are you teaching? Where are you instructing someone else?

Babies need milk because their bodies are not able to handle solid food. It is not that they do not want real food. They just can't handle it. There are many Christians in the church today that just cannot handle the truth because they are not growing in their faith. They have never learned the elementary truths of God's word. They hear the truth over and over again but they never really learn it because they have never used it. They have never tried to teach it.

Listen to me carefully - If you are not teaching you are not learning! The quickest way to learn something is to try to teach it to someone else.

Back in University I was asked by a friend to come and share my testimony at a local youth group. I was terrified at the thought of doing that. At the same time I loved the opportunity and the experience. That experience got me hooked. My faith took a leap forward when I realized that the stuff I was preparing to teach was the stuff I was actually learning.

The minute you stop teaching you stop growing and the moment you stop growing you start going stale. Do you understand what stale means? Stale things lose their desirability. Who would choose stale bread over fresh? Stale things stagnate. They make people sick.

God wants us to take what we have received and use it. Your faith will never be so energised as when you use it. If you feel like your faith is dry and you are far from God then maybe what you need is not more information but more participation. Get involved in sharing your faith in some practical way.

The church needs disciplers. It has been said that the success of McDonalds is not that they can teach a kid to make a hamburger but that they teach a kid to train another kid to make a hamburger. Our focus in ministry needs to be on more than just bringing people to Jesus but also on training people to become trainers.

Dwight L Moody said, "It is better to train ten people than to do the work of ten people. But it is much harder."

If you folded a piece of paper 50 times it would be 100 Million Kms – about 2/3 the distance from the Earth to the Sun. What would you rather do? Win 1 person to Christ every day for 16 years or win and disciple 1 person every 6 months for 16 years. If you won 1 person for Christ every day for 16 years you would reach 6022 persons. However, if you disciple 1 person every 6 months for 16 years you would reach 4,294,961,296. The entire world would be reached in 16 years! The world is in need of people who are disciple makers.

We are called as Christians to be disciples and to disciple others. Who is following your example? Who are you training up to take over when you are gone? Entrust what you have learned to others.

2. DON'T GET DISTRACTED – reject getting sidetracked

The second priority Paul says is endurance. The training a soldier goes through to enter the army is very difficult. They are forced to get up early to discipline their bodies. They are exposed to extremes of climate and often go without sleep, food, and water to discipline their minds. The goal is not only physical training but mental training. They are trained to not think as individuals but as members of a team. Leaving in the middle of boot camp would be disastrous because you would lose your focus. In order to complete the rigorous training you need concentration. You have to stop thinking like a civilian and start thinking like a soldier.

The hardships that soldiers are exposed to as part of their training and are not intended to hurt or destroy them but to make them better soldiers. The army knows the difficulties they will face in combat after their training is over. The trainers know that they are headed for dangerous situations and that the best way to protect the young recruits from death is to make them as disciplined, obedient and tough as possible.

In describing the Christian life to Timothy, Paul uses the army as an example. As Christians we need to recognize that there is a battle that is raging all around us. To do and be what God wants for us we need to be disciplined and focused. To often however we get sidetracked by other things and lose our focus of what is truly important.

A saint's life is in the hands of God as a bow and arrow in the hands of an archer. God is aiming at something the saint cannot see; he stretches and strains, and every now and again the saint says, "I cannot stand any more." But God does not heed; he goes on stretching until his purpose is in sight, then he lets fly. We are here for God's designs, not for our own. -- Oswald Chambers

A young sailor had gone AWOL and had been picked up by the FBI over six months later in Nashville. After the case was presented to the officers that were judging the case, they asked the young man if he had any thing to say. Against the advice of his attorney he insisted on talking. He told the judges that he hated the navy and had found a girl he wanted to marry. He asked to be discharged. The Judge's verdict was severe. Six months hard labour, reduction in rank, loss of pay and he had to complete the full term of his enlistment. And then the Judge said - "that's all". The young man had a look of shock on his face as the Marine guards led him away to the Brig. You may have every excuse in the world for going over the wall spiritually but none is justified. You don't un-enlist. You belong to God.

3. DON'T TAKE DETOURS – resist taking shortcuts

The third priority Paul says is discipline. He goes on to describe the Christian life as being like an athlete in training to compete in games to win an award. This is a common picture that Paul used:

1 Cor 9:24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. 27 No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize

2 Tim 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Heb 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

It says in Hebrews that, as a disciple, each of us has a race that has been marked out for us by Christ. We do not choose the course, God does. There are rules in competition. Often there is the temptation to make our own course and take shortcuts.

Jane Seville was a favourite to win the race walking competition in the Sydney Games. She led the entire 20 km race and was sure to win the event as she headed into the Olympic stadium. Just as she approached the tunnel leading into the stadium where almost 100,000 Australians were preparing to celebrate she broke her stride and was disqualified (a technical infraction). Though she had walked all that way she lost in the last km because she broke the rules.

Adversities do not make a man frail; they show what sort of man he is. -- Thomas A Kempis

In a recent NCAA cross-country championship held in Riverside, California, 123 of the 128 runners missed a turn. Mike Delcavo was the 1st runner who stayed on the 10,000 meter course. He began waving for fellow runners to follow him, but only 4 other runners came with him. After an interviewer asked him how the other runners responded when he stopped following the crowd, Delcavo responded, "They thought it was funny when I went the right way."

Disciple making is a process and it takes work. There are no short cuts. You don't just sleep with your Bible under your pillow and wake up the next day a mature follower of Christ. There are no "10 easy steps" or condensed versions of the process. Being a disciple means hard work and making disciples is likewise a long and time consuming process.

4. DON'T BECOME DISCOURAGED – rest in your successes

The fourth priority Paul says is perseverance. Being an athlete and soldier is hard work – and so is farming. Farmers work long hours and often the work can be very discouraging. Farmers work hard at planting their crop but then they are totally dependant upon the weather. Too much of one thing or too little of another can easily destroy years of hard work and eliminate your harvest.

Years ago I was pastoring a church in Niagara-on-the-Lake. A number of people from the church grew grapes for the wine industry. One winter there was one week when it was very cold. These farmers could only watch as the temperature plummeted and their precious vines froze and died. Years of harvest was destroyed.

So how do you endure the life of a farmer? How do you persevere? You make sure you take the time to rest and rejoice in the harvest. There is joy in the harvest. It is a time the farmer can finally rest and enjoy the fruits of his labours.

It's a rare person who doesn't get discouraged. Whether it happens to us or to an associate we're trying to cheer up, the answer centres around one word: perseverance -- Bob Phillips

When God made the world he rested on the 7th day. He proclaimed it a Sabbath and said that every week we should take a day to stop our work and spend time relaxing, reflecting and rejoicing in His presence. What spiritual fruit are you enjoying in your life? Is there anything in your life that, although painful at the time, you can look back now and be thankful for?

See the possibilities. Here's a fellow who sold insurance, and he went after a particularly difficult customer, a man that no one had been able to sell. Eventually he sold him a fifty-thousand-dollar policy. Back in 1883 when this occurred, that was a very large policy. He took out his pen and handed it to the man to sign the contract. When the man tried to write, the pen wouldn't write. He tried several times without success and finally handed the pen back with the contract and said, "I'd better think this over a little while longer." The man lost the sale.

He went home disappointed and discouraged because he had lost the sale, and he determined right then and there that he would never lose another sale because of a fountain pen that didn't work. So he sat down and invented his own fountain pen. His name was Louis Waterman, and the Waterman Fountain Pen became the premier writing instrument of America for the next fifty years. Out of discouragement, came great possibility.

The Franciscans were the first ones to systematically grow grapes in California. One year they had a terrible drought, and the grapes withered on the vine. They thought they were going to lose them all, but they took those grapes down into the towns and sold them as what they called "Peruvian delicacies." That was the beginning of the Sun Maid Raisin Company.

When we persevere through trials God will bless us. It is discipline, endurance and perseverance and action that make us mature in our faith. They make our life fruitful. Without these things we will never become the men and women that God want us to be.

The person who has not struggled with difficulty and discouragement cannot know the joy of genuine success. Face your problems and fight your way through them. There is more satisfaction in putting forth effort than gloating over easily won profits. The rungs on the ladder of success are composed of difficulties. -- Vern McLellan,

Where are you at today? Perhaps you have become stale. Perhaps you are comfortable in your faith. You go to church – when it suits you. You say your prayers – when it's convenient. You read the bible – as long as it does not become an inconvenience.

Do you want to leave a legacy? Do you want your life to make a difference? Don't forget discipleship, don't get distracted, don't take detours and don't become discouraged.