

# **The Abundant Life**

by Walton Weaver

A brother once defined life as the time between birth and death. In more precise terms he said it is "the series of experiences in the existence of a human being."

Defined in this way time becomes one of the most important things a person possesses. Benjamin Franklin asked, "Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of. "

Life is real! Life is earnest!  
And the grave is not its goal;  
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,  
Was not spoken of the soul."

--Henry W. Longfellow

What should a man live for? Our choices become important not only because we are dealing with our immortal souls, but because time for every man is so short; life is brief at best. The brevity of life is what led James to ask, "What is your life?" (Jas. 4:14). Man does not know what will happen tomorrow. Will he live and be able to do this or that? James says man does not know, so he ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that" (Jas. 4:15). Man must use his time now, and he must use it wisely (Eph. 5:15), to prepare for eternity.

The person in the world does not live "in view of eternity." His life is on a different plain than that of the Christian. Those who would be Jesus' disciples are challenged to consider, "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" (Matt. 6:25). The obvious answer to those who have considered this matter "in view of eternity" is, "yes," life is more than food and the body is more than clothing. Life has a deeper meaning than "things"; we do more than "eat, and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32), because we know that at the coming of the Lord Jesus from heaven we shall be raised (1 Cor. 15:35-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18), and after this the judgment (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-15). In view of the resurrection and the judgment life is more than food and clothing. We must do more with life than make a living; we must make something of our lives.

Christians are ordinary people living extraordinary lives. The Christian must never think that God is looking for him to be "average;" the word God uses to describe our lives is the word "abundant." Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (Jno. 10:10). Those who have the abundant life are living abounding lives.

**Abounding Love**

Paul prayed that the love of the Philippians might "abound still more and more" (Phil. 1:9; cf. 1 Thess 3:12). The word abound means to exceed, to go over and above, beyond measure, to be superior, to overflow. When one abounds in love he has more than what is required. He exceeds the bare minimum. The amazing thing about these people is that Paul did not need to challenge them to have an abounding love; their love was already overflowing. It had been shown in their fellowship with Paul in the preaching of the gospel (vs. 5; 4:15ff.). But even an abounding love may be increased or enlarged. So Paul prayed that their love may overflow "more and more"! These latter terms coupled with the word abound "conveys the idea of extreme and continually increasing abundance" (Plummer). Even abounding love must be continually making progress.

We are not left to guess as to how abounding love is to grow. It must be ever increasing in "knowledge and in all judgment." Love is not blind. It is to be guided and controlled by spiritual knowledge. The word for "knowledge" is a word which means knowledge that is advanced, precise and full. Even this knowledge must be intelligently applied to life, so Paul adds the word "judgment," which more precisely is "discernment"--the ability to "select, classify, and apply what is furnished by knowledge" (Vincent). Only those who are full-grown or mature are able to successfully do these things.

Paul wants Christians to abound more and more in love that they may reach the point in their knowledge and discernment where they will be able "to approve things that are excellent" (vs. 10). The ASV says "distinguish the things that differ." The first word may mean either distinguish or approve, and the second word may mean excellent or differ. To distinguish would mean to prove, and of course there can be no approving without first proving. The Christian must prove things to be true, but he must also learn to approve things on the basis of their excellence, i.e., their superior quality. The matter of approving things that are excellent involves making the best choices between options; choosing the best over the better. While some things may be right in themselves, and not harmful to the Christian, they may not be best for him.

## **Abounding Work**

The Christian who is enjoying the abundant life is also "abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). Often love and work are coupled together. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6). "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father" (1 Thess. 1:3). As the motive, abounding love will result in abounding work. Just as love is to exceed the bare minimum, so work done by the Christian is to excel, overflow and abound. The abundant life does not produce as little work as one can get by with; it produces an abundance of good works.

The Christian who lives the abundant life puts forth his very best effort, doing as much as he possibly can for the Lord. There is so much work to be done and so few laborers to do it (Matt. 9:37-38). Too many Christians work only in spurts, but the verse

says "always" abounding in the work of the Lord; and not a few are failing to abound or excel in that work.

This abounding work is "the work of the Lord." It is not my work, or your work; it is the Lord's work. This gives greater meaning to the thing we are doing. When we are teaching that lost soul, encouraging that newborn Christian, or sitting with that sick person, we are doing the Lord's work. This is work He wants us to do. We must not become discouraged in doing this work, "knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." There are good results that will come from our labor, not only in this life, but especially in the next. What Paul has said about the resurrection gives us assurance that our abounding work will be rewarded.

### **Abounding Giving**

When Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to give to help supply the needs for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem, he gave the Macedonians, who first gave themselves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:1-5), as an example of liberality to inspire them to "abound in this grace also" (2 Cor. 8:7). He wanted them to go beyond the bare minimum, to exceed what would be required. That's what the Macedonians had done, and that's what all Christians should do. Our attitude is not, how little can I give and get by with it. The "diligence" of the Macedonians whose affliction, abundance of joy and deep poverty "abounded in the riches of their liberality" (2 Cor. 8:2), is given to "test the sincerity of your love" (2 Cor. 8:8, 24). Notice how Paul brings love and abounding liberality in giving together, just as love and abounding work are tied together. Our love for the Lord should inspire us to "abound" (2 Cor. 8:7), be "liberal" (2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11) and be "bountiful" (2 Cor. 9:6; cf. a different word in 2 Cor. 8:20, "abundance") in our giving.

In giving, just as in working, one will reap as he has sown. "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Cor. 9:6). When Christians give liberally, God who is able to make all grace abound toward us, will see to it that we "have an abundance for every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8). We must never forget how much Jesus gave to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

### **Conclusion**

Jesus wants us to have the abundant life. The life he gives is life of abundant grace (Rom. 5:17, 20; Eph. 1:7-8), abundant love (Rom. 5:8-9), abundant joy (2 Cor. 8:2), and abundant peace (Phil. 4:7). Through Him we are able to abound in love, in work, and in our giving. Are you enjoying the abundant life?