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Making The Most of Life
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Psalm 34

I would like to share with you today about Making the Most of Life. The American philosopher William James wrote, *"The great use of life is to spend it for something that outlasts it."* The sad truth is some people don't make the most of life and one of the first reasons is because they don't make wise decisions. When we were on a church mission trip to Alabama a number of years ago, the construction supervisor for Habitat for Humanity was quite a storyteller and he told us in his drawl, *"Many a young Alabama boy's last words are, 'Watch this...'"* The news is filled with these kinds of stories.

For example, ignoring Coast Guard warnings in mid-March a couple years ago, David Manley ventured onto the icy surface of Saginaw Bay, Michigan with his pickup truck one chilly morning. Predictably, the vehicle broke through the ice, but the 41-year-old managed to avert tragedy and escape from the sinking truck. He reached the shore wet and cold, but alive. Despite his traumatic experience, and despite a day of sunshine and warm temperatures in the 60s, David returned to Saginaw Bay late the following night. This time he was driving an all-terrain vehicle, and accompanied by a friend. Surprise! The ATV also plunged through the ice. His companion survived, but David had used up his luck.

On 2 August 2002, in Kansas, police said an Olathe man was struck and killed by a train after his vehicle broke down on Interstate 35. His attempts at repairing his car had failed, and he had stepped away from the busy freeway to call for help, when the train engineer spotted him standing on the tracks. The engineer said the man was holding a cell phone to one ear, and cupping his hand to the other ear to block the noise of the train.

At work in Brazil in January of 2003, Manoel Coelho was responsible for cleaning out the storage tanks of gasoline tanker trucks. One day the 35-year-old began to fill a tanker with water, a standard safety procedure that forces flammable vapor out of the container. He returned an hour later to check whether

the water level was high enough to proceed. But he had trouble deciding, because it was so DARK inside the tanker.

A resourceful employee, Manoel forgot the very reason why he was filling the tank with water when he lit a cigarette lighter to shed some light on the situation. His little test successfully determined that the water level was NOT yet high enough for safety. The vapor explosion launched him through the air, and he landed in the company parking lot 100 meters away.

In September 2003, in Escobedo, Mexico, an unidentified 60-year-old man was still thirsty after drinking what most would consider *“too much alcohol.”* He stumbled toward a nearby bee’s nest, perhaps hoping to follow the beer with a bit of honey, which the bees would surely share. Instead, over a thousand noble bees sacrificed their lives to protect the hive. The man, quite reasonably, went into anaphylactic shock and died.

A hospital spokesman disputed the theory that the bees alone had killed him, attributing his demise to *“the stupid things drunken people do,”* pointing out that the man was otherwise healthy and **could have enjoyed a long life.** *“The combination was lethal.”*

These poor souls did not make the most of life. I don’t mean to sound ungracious or uncaring, but the truth is **an important step in making the most of life is not to make poor decisions, choices, or plans.**

In December of 1965, the Beatles released their album, Rubber Soul, which included the song, “Nowhere Man.”

“He’s a real nowhere man
Sitting in his nowhere land
Making all his nowhere plans
For nobody
Doesn’t have a point of view
Knows not where he’s going to
Isn’t he a bit like you and me?”

Well I sure hope not! That song doesn’t exactly inspire one to seize life with both hands and make the most of it with every ounce of energy we have

does it? Like Jesus, who made the very most of his life right to his final breath, we also want to live wisely, and passionately for the glory of God. What a contrast “Nowhere Man” is with what David wrote in Psalm 34, *“O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt God’s name together.*

O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.”

Or with what Paul writes to the church in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, **“You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”**

In his book, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, John Piper writes, “If you are a Christian, you are not your own. Christ has bought you at the price of his own death. You now belong doubly to God: He made you, and he bought you. That means your life is not your own. It is God’s.” Unlike some other religions, Christianity believes we have only one life and we don’t want to waste it, we want to make the most of it.

Psalm 34 reveals several key points that help us to make the most of life. Verse 1, *“I will bless the Lord **at all times**; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”*

Making the most of life means blessing the Lord in all times and seasons of life, good and bad, up and down, joy and sorrow. We look for what we can praise God for in the midst of it all. This helps to keep our perspective healthy.

Kathleen Norris said,

“Life is easier to take than you’d think. All that is necessary is to accept the impossible, do without the indispensable, and bear the intolerable.” So much depends on where we place our focus on the blessings or on the intolerable.

Henry David Thoreau wrote,

“The fault-finder will find faults even in paradise. Love your life.”

Verse 2, *“My soul makes its boast in the Lord;”* We boast in the Lord, not in ourselves. Jonathan Edwards was one of the great pastors and theologians of 18th century America. Edwards lived in western Massachusetts and his preaching and writing helped fuel the religious revival that became known as the Great Awakening. His life is inspiring because of his zeal not to waste it, and because of his passion for the supremacy of God. When he was in his early

twenties, he wrote a number of resolutions aimed to help him make the most of his life for the glory of God. Some of them were:

“Resolution #5: Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but to improve it the most profitable way I possibly can.

Resolution #6: Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live, and as I shall wish I had done ten thousand ages hence.

Resolution #17: Resolved, that I will live so, as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.”

Sadly Edwards died at the age of 54 from a failed smallpox vaccination, but he had lived well and his work continues to inspire people almost 250 years after his death.

We boast in the Lord not in ourselves and we seek to live with all our might, making the most of time, and living in a way that would give joy to God and ourselves.

Psalm 34:4-6, 17, *“I sought the Lord and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears... This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord. When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears.”* – **we seek the Lord in prayer and we don’t imagine that just because we’re trying to live God’s way that we will be spared difficulty.**

In verse 19, David notes, *“Many are the afflictions of the righteous,”* trials will come to all of us, but the Lord hears our prayers, delivers us, and is with us in our darkest hours.

Psalm 34:7,9, and 11, tell us making the most of life means having an appropriate *“fear of the Lord.”* When the Bible talks about the “fear of the Lord” it usually means **the awe that a person ought to have before God.** For example, sometimes a person, meaning no harm or disrespect, may casually refer to God, “as the man upstairs” which suggests perhaps an older landlord who lives on the second floor. I don’t think the writers of the scriptures would be comfortable talking about God that way. We are to have awe, respect, and even a healthy, humble sense of fear of God, as loving as God is. Think about how humbled and small one can feel on the ocean in a storm, or in the face of a

blizzard, or a powerful thunderstorm. We could expect to have a little fear in the presence of the Creator of the universe, even though we know God's character is that of a good, loving, caring, deliverer who hears our cries.

Verse 12 says, "**Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days,**" (that would be most of us, then this is what you have to do) *"keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it."*

If we want to make the most of life then we need to practice of the fear of the Lord by avoiding evil in speech or action and by doing of good in pursuit of the peace or welfare of others. Will Rogers said, *"So live that you would not be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip."*

Life is precious and as the illustrations I used to start the sermon revealed it can end in a moment. As a result we need to live with a couple of thoughts in mind. *"The art of living successfully consists of being able to hold two opposite ideas in tension at the same time: **first, to make long-term plans as if we were going to live forever; and, second, to conduct ourselves daily as if we were going to die tomorrow.**"* Sydney J. Harris

The simple fact that the Bible says so much about how we are to live tells us that our lives on earth are crucially important. Author George Bernard Shaw used a poetic image to portray life, he said, *"I am convinced that **my life belongs to the whole community;** and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it what I can, for the harder I work the more I live. **I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle for me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I got hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before turning it over to future generations.**"*

I'd like to think God wants us to live more like a splendid torch, burning as brightly as we can while we can. Another way to look at our life is to *"Live your life each day as you would climb a mountain. An occasional glance toward the summit keeps the goal in mind, but many beautiful scenes are to be observed from each new vantage point. Climb slowly, steadily, enjoying each*

passing moment; and the view from the summit will serve as a fitting climax for the journey. Harold V. Melchert

Finally making the most of life means we aren't so heavenly minded that we're no earthly good. John Piper tells the following story, "In April 2000, Ruby Eliason and Laura Edwards were killed in Cameroon, West Africa. Ruby was over eighty. Single all her life, she poured it out for one great thing: to make Jesus Christ known among the unreached, the poor, and the sick. Laura was a widow, a medical doctor, pushing eighty years old, and serving at Ruby's side in Cameroon. The brakes failed, the car went over a cliff, and they were both killed instantly. I asked my congregation: Was that a tragedy? Two lives, driven by one great passion, namely to be spent in unheralded service to the perishing poor for the glory of Jesus Christ – even two decades after most of their American counterparts had retired to throw away their lives on trifles. No, that is not a tragedy. That is a glory. These lives were not wasted. And these lives were not lost. Jesus said (Mark 8:35), *"Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."*¹

A Psalm of Life by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

**Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.**

**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.**

**Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;**

¹ John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, (Crossway Books: Wheaton, IL, 2003), 45.

**But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.**

**Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.**

**In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!**

**Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,--act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!**

**Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;--**

**Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.**

**Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;**

**Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.**

“Every year that I live I am more convinced that the waste of life lies in the love we have not given, the powers we have not used, the selfish prudence which will risk nothing, and which, shirking pain, misses happiness as well.” John B. Tabb

Blessing: **“May you live all the days of your life.”** Jonathan Swift

“Be such a man (or woman), and live such a life, that if every man (or woman) were such as you, and every life a life like yours, this earth would be God’s paradise.”

Phillips Brooks