

“Living in the Present”
 1 Corinthians 7:29-31
 January 24, 2021
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How do you live in the present?

By that I mean how do you live so that you are open to the day and the hour?

Living in the present means being in tune with where you are.

In tune with who you are with...

In tune to the things around you...

Living in the present means - - for me - - being totally alive and awake.

Reminiscing about the past is NOT an example - - of living in the present.

Neither is regret about the past.

Worrying about the future is NOT an example - - of living in the present.

Neither is planning ahead.

At the same time - - giving up on the future is NOT an example either.

Sitting with someone while each of you poke at your phones

and while doing so you ignore each other - - is NOT an example.

The thing is - - I spend a lot of time reminiscing, and regretting, and worrying, and planning, and sometimes I feel like giving up, and sometimes I am distracted by my phone.

So - - this is for me too.

And the question is - - if we spend so much time on these other things - - WHY would you want to live in the present anyway? / What's so great about living life to the fullest?

Why not just live with regret - - in a semi alive state of satiation?

Grab a beer and a bag of snacks and wait life out...

Anyone think that sounds good?

Well - - in the Bible - - Paul seems to recommend living in the present.

But it is not quite as simple as that.

He does it by - - emphasizing that - - life is short.

He says that we don't have much time.

And that we should LIVE - - AS IF - - we don't have much time.

So for some people who don't read all of what Paul says - - this small part of what he says - - leads to some mistaken ideas about how to live. / Namely that - - IF life is short we should just party - - or tear down everything because who cares - - or hunker down and wait life out. / But that is NOT what Paul is saying. / It is important to read the whole letter not just a few verses.

So let's try to do that - - by considering WHY Paul wrote these verses about...

...time being short - - and the world passing away.

I'll start with what Paul thinks God is doing.

Then I'll move to what WE might do in response.

Paul was convinced that the return of Christ is just around the corner. / Which meant that just like God came into the world in Jesus - - at his birth in a manger - - and then was with Jesus on the cross during the worst - - God would come into the world again to finish the TRANSFORMATION of the world.

The early followers of Jesus did not believe that God would destroy the world.

Instead that the world would be transformed.

But - - transformation DID mean - - that everything we see - - would pass away.

Things would NOT stay the way they were.

They would be transformed.

For example, in the section we read for this morning, Paul addresses several topics:

Marriage - - Mourning - - Financial matters - - And worldly affairs

In each case Paul says to act as if it did not exist.

But the entire rest of the letter contains advice about how to act in these very areas!

So - - Paul gives detailed advice about marital relationships, and intimacy.

And Paul describes how to negotiate lawsuits and other worldly affairs.

He describes how to eat and how to abstain from gluttony.

He even details how the offering should be collected and used in the churches.

So clearly Paul doesn't expect people to STOP living! / In fact Paul expects people to fully ENGAGE life. / And to do it knowing - - that everything is passing away!

Everything is passing away - - says Paul - - so live FULLY in the PRESENT!

No one would swim hard to get on a sinking ship - - right?

Or spend a fortune on a piece of swamp land...

Paul urges us to ENGAGE this life - - NOT to abandon it.

Because - - this life as we know it IS passing away - - BUT...

...it will be TRANSFORMED and REPLACED by GOD!

God is NOT out to destroy the world!! / God is out to TRANSFORM the world.

And the difference - - is absolutely crucial.

Because - - when we get it - - it effects how we live in the present.

Some of you know the benediction I sometimes use:

“Life is short and we have but little time - - to gladden the hearts of those who travel the way with us - - so be swift to love and make haste to be kind.”

What you might NOT know is the story of the man who first said it...

The saying is attributed to a Swiss philosopher and poet named, Henri-Frederic Amiel.

He lived in Geneva in the 1800s.

His parents died when he was young.

He was isolated politically because of fighting political parties.

His isolation inspired his writing.

But he died thinking his writing would fail to be noticed - - at age 59.

His only book of note was published after his death.

Even though he felt his life was a failure in worldly terms - -

he fought against the skepticism of his age.

Life is short - - so be swift to love.

Life is short - - so make haste to be kind.

Life is short - - so try to gladden the hearts of others.

NOT - - life is short so be bitter and look out for yourself.

BUT - - life is short - - so love while you can.

That - - is how I interpret Paul as well.

Can you think of anyone who had a BRIEF - - but AMAZING life?

John Lennon died at age 40.

Otis Redding died in a plane crash at age 26.

He had just written "Sitting On the Dock of the Bay".

Martin Luther King Jr. was 39.

Kobe Bryant was 41. / His daughter Gianna was 13.

The list could go on and on...

There is a segment on PBS Newshour called: “Brief but Spectacular” that is worth your time if you’re looking for something to listen to.

In the most recent one - - designer Fred Dust shares his “Brief But Spectacular” take on how we can all communicate better together. In a world of Zoom and FaceTime, he says, conversations may be more critical than ever - - to find connection.

In another one we learn that when Beth's daughter Bella was born, she was diagnosed with a rare, degenerative genetic disorder and given 18 months to live.

That diagnosis was more than four years ago. Beth shares her “Brief But Spectacular” take on the important role palliative care has played in her family's journey as they continue to create meaningful memories for Bella.

These are examples of how to live in the present.

What would it be like - - for us to create some examples in our lives?

I certainly don’t have all the answers as to how.

But it seems to me it is more important than ever that we try.

To live now - - in this present moment - - without fear and with some hope.

As you think about that remember Officers Howard Liebengood and Brian Sicknick.

They were two of the Capitol Police officers who confronted the riot.

They died from their injuries at ages 51 and 42.

Or remember the heroes of September 11, 2001.

X. J. Kennedy remembers in this shocking poem called:

“September Twelfth, 2001”

“Two caught on film who hurtle
from the eighty-second floor...

choosing between a fireball
 and to jump holding hands
 aren't us.

I wake beside you
 Stretch, scratch, taste the air
 The incredible joy of coffee
 And the morning light.

Alive we open eyelids
 on our pitiful share of time,
 we bubbles rising and bursting
 in a boiling pot.”

As I read the poem I thought:

Maybe we are more than bubbles.

Maybe we can take some responsibility for the boiling.

Life is short.

But we can choose how we live it.

As Paul says the form of this world is passing away.

But until it does - - here we still are.

Alive.

In this present moment.

This present moment is right here for you and for me.

We can plan ahead if we want. / We can worry about the future until we are sick.

We can regret and reminisce.

Or - - we can live.

Gladden hearts.

Love.

Be kind.

As Paul says at the end of the letter in chapter 15:

Be steadfast.

Be immovable.

Abound in the work of God.

And KNOW - -

- - that your work is NOT in vain.