

Nothing to Live For

Somebody once said, "Many people have everything to live WITH and nothing to live FOR." How true that is. Many wealthy people live hollow, meaningless lives. They have more than enough possessions to make life comfortable, but they have little purpose in life to make it meaningful.

It takes decades before some people eventually realize that life lived for mere self-indulgence is ultimately an empty life. A time can come, however, when even the shiniest new car, or the biggest house, or the flashiest jewelry, can't mask the hollowness of a life without high purpose.

The Bible doesn't condemn all wealth, and new cars and nice houses are not wrong. But lasting satisfaction doesn't come from these things or self-indulgence. On the other hand, people with little to live with may have much to live for. For example, Jesus' apostles were not wealthy (Acts 3:6), but their lives had real purpose.

The Scriptures assure us that God can bring purpose into our lives, too. He can give us something to live for that is missing from the lives of people whose lives are hollow and without purpose, something that can ultimately take you to be with God.

- by David Watts

A Few Words about Our Thrill-Seeking Culture

In the recent years we have developed a thrill-seeking culture – a culture moved more by emotional stimuli than careful thought – that affects many facets of our lives. I have not been to a movie in years, but I have seen trailers on TV and digital video, and heard people talk about them. I have noticed many come away more enamored with the thrilling "special effects" while having only a sketchy memory of the plot or story behind the effects. At musical concerts, for the most part, the primary attention is given to special effects to create an emotional atmosphere than to thoughtful lyrics that convey real messages.

I fear this culture is affecting public worship. People are "going to church" - not to be challenged to think on spiritual things - but to be thrilled by the "special effects" generated by preachers and "worship leaders." Rather than songs, clearly worded and sung to praise God and to teach each other - words primarily appealing to the head rather than to the arms and feet - the order of the day is for "special effects" designed to give worshipers an emotional high. Sermons must be jazzed up with verbal and electronic special effects so that the audience can be thrilled rather than informed or convicted in their minds. I am not speaking of the use of visual aids, computer generated or otherwise. Visual aids are great tools when they truly "aid" the listener's understanding, but when used for emotional, thrill and awe value, they are questionable to say the least. I saw a video a while back of a congregation partaking of the Lord's Supper while an electronically produced large cross was "floating" around the auditorium. A little too much – me thinks.

As I read the New Testament I get the idea public worship is to be done from the heart in a solemn manner, glorifying God and seriously reflecting on the words uttered in the songs, prayers and discourses.

- by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

A Painful Operation

In 1809, Dr. Ephraim McDowell's examination of a patient revealed that she had an abdominal tumor that would soon kill her. Though abdominal surgery was unheard of in those days, the woman finally persuaded the doctor to operate.

After a twenty-six minute surgery the doctor removed a twenty-two pound tumor. Since there were no anesthetics in those days, the woman's pain was almost unbearable. Why, then, would she so forcefully insist that the doctor inflict this agony upon her? Quite simply, because she preferred the pain to its alternative – death.

One of the most painful examinations that any sincere seeker of truth must experience is the self-examination that God requires of us all. "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified" (2 Co 13:5).

Our goal should be to examine our life with the same objectivity that God uses in evaluating our character. Since He knows all about us (Heb. 4:13), and because His "gauge" is the only accurate one, we should appreciate any proper correction in our life.

If the exam reveals a flaw in my character, and if I want to avoid spiritual death, I will gladly accept the correction. If I want to die, I can simply ignore the warnings or refuse to take the examination. It's that simple.

- by Rick Duggin

Challenges for the New Year

The beginning of a new year provides an excellent opportunity for us to pause, ponder, plan, and prepare for the future. We hope that the new year will especially cause us all to think about our spiritual service to God and how we can improve in the fulfillment of our duties to Him. Let us challenge you in these specific areas:

- Spend more time in prayer. Don't allow the day to begin or end without spending time in prayer to God. Throughout the day, stop and petition Him for help and strength. And, by all means, don't just wait for a crisis to develop before you think to pray. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

- Study your Bible more consistently. Use one of the available daily Bible reading calendars, or come up with your own plan to read on a regular basis. Don't just rush through a few verses. Instead, really study the text to learn its meaning. Before you end a reading session, think about how you can make application of what you've read in a real and practical way. "Give attendance to reading . . ." (1 Timothy 4:13).

- Attend every Bible study and worship in this New Year. This, of course, is your duty -- but it is also a privilege. BE HERE! Make this a high priority. Why would you not want to be present to worship God and study His Word? "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together . . ." (Hebrews 10:25).

- Teach the lost. We all have friends, neighbors, co-workers and family members who are lost in sin. They NEED us to share the gospel with them. Make a firm commitment to reach at least one of them with the "good news" this year. If each Christian would bring just one person to the Lord each year, we could soon convert the whole world. Let's do it! "Go ye therefore and teach all nations . . ." (Matthew 28:19).

- Live a pure, godly life. Nothing else matters if we are not living faithfully for the Lord. Think about this, and let it be manifested in how you talk, where you go, who you associate with, how you dress, etc. Others are looking to you, and evaluating Christianity on the basis of what they see of it in you. "Ye are the light of the world . . . let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

In a very real sense, having a "Happy New Year" depends on how well you fulfill your spiritual duties to God. Think!

- by Greg Gwin