

Do Your Best, Then Rest

Have you ever wondered what you might say before God? Are you curious and inquisitive? Do you have many questions that beg to be answered? Did Jesus really have to go to the cross in order to save us or could there have been another way? What about all the suffering in the world? Why didn't God stop the Armenian and Jewish Holocausts? What about the deep mysteries of time and eternity? Why was I born at this time and given this specific body? If you came before Almighty God what questions would you ask?

Job was a biblical character who found himself in the midst of a lot of personal suffering. If you read the story of Job in the Bible, you will see a man who suffered many things unjustly. Although he had many questions for God, despite his trials, he never questioned the existence of God. Perhaps you will find yourself asking the same questions of God that Job asked. When we see injustice and confusing issues that we cannot understand do we feel as Job did? Job said, "Oh that I knew where I might find God, that I might come even to his seat! I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments." (Job 23:3-4).

God finally did answer Job and spoke of his eternal power and magnificence. When Job encountered God's stunning presence, suddenly all his questions melted away and he was left to contemplate God's glory. Job replied, "I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Therefore, I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:2, 6). Suddenly all of Job's deep questions paled when faced with the grandeur and beauty of God. One day, "We will know as we are known." (1 Corinthians 13:12). All of our pondering, confusion, and deep questioning will find an answer as we contemplate the Majesty of God.

If you encounter God in a near-death experience, instead of asking God to solve the mysteries of the universe or to tell you your future, like Job, we should be more interested in "repenting in dust and ashes." You simply want to please God and although you do not understand all the mysteries of the universe, God does. You do not have to. Psalm 131 states, "I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul."

We must learn to trust God. Trust begs unanswered questions. We will never have all the answers to all the questions that arise in our hearts. Simply trust God. A favorite prayer when you are in doubt is: Jesus I trust in you. I do not understand all that I am going through, but I trust you will bring me through it.

In a near-death experience one does not remember how much time you stand before God and Jesus because time stands still. After soaking in the Glory of God, you understand that it is time to leave. You don't know how you know, but you realize that God wants you to go back to your life on earth. It is never directly sent to you, but you simply know that it is not your time to die.

You are also given a vision of truth. You understand that God is real. The one question that most people have is, "Is there a God or not?" After a near-death encounter with God you know with certainty that God exists and is a rewarder of those who seek him. (Hebrews 11:6). God may also grace you with what direction your life should take. From that point on, you are to live for God and others and strive to grow in the justification process. You are not given a blueprint of your life other than it lies in God's hands. He will protect you, as he does to all who call upon him, but there is still much for you to do, and the future is still a mystery. One must live in trust.

As you are about to leave the presence of God, telepathically you may become aware what God expects of you and instead of asking a question or a favor or gift as Solomon did when he had his vision of God, you may relate to God that "Now that I know, I will do my best!"

When you wake up from your vision, you may not remember the journey back through the tunnel, nor how much time has passed. You may even burst into tears and sob. You may sob because the truth of what you have just encountered is so fresh in your mind. You are literally being transformed and cleansed by your tears. Later you may reflect upon this and that this is what happens when a baby is born and cries. You are literally reborn and crying which is the natural response. The experience is real and vivid and you feel yourself back in your own body, and well. You may become mystified trying to grasp what all this means to you. You always remember the final words to God that resounds in your spirit, "Now that I know, I will do my best."

What does it mean to do our best for God? It means doing better than you would have if you had not had a near-death experience. It means developing goals and pursuing them. You want to be a witness to the whole world about the truth of God's love. You strive to realize your potential, work on being creative, pursue virtue and aim to become holy. You face your fears courageously. Being your best means concentrating on others, not just yourself. Reaching out and loving others through service is key. It means spending time in worship, prayer and reading every day. Being your best means avoiding sin whenever you are tempted.

Psalm 124 states, "If the Lord had not been on our side then I would have been swallowed up alive. The flood would have swept us away and over us would have gone the raging waters." Our God is one of redemption! He saves us from a futile, frustrating life now and eternal death after. Not only are you saved from weeping and gnashing of teeth, you also have been saved for God's love and eternity in paradise. God is so gracious and good!

Making the Most of Your Life

The best means of living your life is with passion. Strictly speaking, passion means suffering, but it can also mean enthusiasm and energy. Nothing is more pathetic than someone who is living his or her vocation with a lackluster effort. On the other hand, inspiration may come to you when you see someone who is elderly still on fire with their vocation. When people who are married and retired get involved in the community and help others, these individuals, are full of joy and do not regret the past.

We must discipline ourselves and push ourselves to achieve our potential. Being your best is part of your daily surrender to God. This includes beginning every morning by taking responsibility for our health now and in the future. Try to eat well and exercise.

Exercising and pressing on are apt metaphors for making the most of your life. Paul The Apostle wrote about "Running the race and fighting the good fight." (1 Corinthians 9:24, 1 Timothy 6:12). Life is a struggle and the wind can be in our face at times. We must keep leaning into it with determination. Paul also put it this way, "Straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal..." (Philippians 4:13–14). Pressing on means standing firm and facing fear when it comes against you. It means learning, doing the work you need to do and being creative. It means setting goals and being determined to see them accomplished. It means being disciplined consistently in all areas of your life. Leaning into it means not giving up when things are hard!

Life is difficult for everyone, not only just for you. Do not take anything that comes against you personally. Everyone is in the same boat. God is an equal opportunity employer and the devil is an equal opportunity destroyer. Everyone has to deal with various trials and tribulations. Do not let difficulties deter you from achieving and growing and being your best. Obstacles can be opportunities. Every day we are sowing seeds by our attitude and the way we live. Eventually, if we keep it up, we will see results and bear fruit. (Galatians 6:9). The words of Jesus are inspiring, "Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life... The one who conquers will sit with me on my throne." (Revelation 2:10, 3:21). We are in a life battle now and the struggle has infinite meaning.

No Pain, No Gain

As you travel through the pilgrimage of this life you become aware of major sufferings that you may have to endure. Are these scars that can be turned into stars? Our sinful nature is being put to death and a new person is emerging. Remember, we are justified and are being justified. God will use the pains, disturbances and thorns in our lives to prepare us for our death. As we surrender to God in these "weaknesses," we learn humility and open ourselves up to the working of God. Our powerlessness can be a source of God's power at work in us.

The scriptural example of this is Paul's "thorn in the flesh." After boasting about his many touches and revelations from God, he humbly brought up the subject of his sufferings.

"And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" (2 Corinthians 12:7–9).

Paul realized that along with the abundance of revelations, his "thorn" was a part of God's plan for his life. It brought him humility in the midst of all his visions. It helped him to rely more on God than on himself. (2 Corinthians 1:9). Also, mysteriously, this thorn manifested God's power to mature and sanctify Paul. (Scholars still debate exactly what this thorn was.)

In our struggles to become the best we can be, we discover that the thorn is God's instrument. God does not always remove them but he uses them. God turns our flaws into blessings. You begin to realize, that the thorn in your life makes you rely more on God. Running away from your problems only makes them worse. The only way to victory is to go through it, not around. (Isaiah 43:2). We are all in need and dependence on God. One of the benefits of suffering is that you are able to help others who also may be in need. It is easier to relate to people and their problems because of your sufferings, you learn compassion. Compassion is a virtue with an expensive price tag.

Instead of being independent, selfish and self-serving, helping in a community setting challenges you to be virtuous. You learn direction from superiors and the beauty of submission and obedience. You grow in your concern for the welfare of others. You learn to share and give and that you always cannot have it your own way. While you may not always agree with others on certain topics, you find yourself praying and being concerned about the needs and lives of others. You are challenged to forgive those who come against you and you know that you are being taught humility and a growing in self-esteem that is not determined by people or circumstances. Self acceptance has much deeper roots than the applause of a crowd or the disdain of others.

One must surrender to God in all the thorns of our lives. Like Paul, you may ask for them to be removed. But, they may not be taken away. God is faithful so you know that there is a reason for everything in your life and God is using these situations to help you die to yourself and to rely on God and live in a deeper surrender every day. God detests pride and independence. He wants our trust in surrender. Our daily surrender and a positive attitude in enduring suffering is in preparation for our death. Paul said, "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." (2 Corinthians 4:16–17).

Go Through, Not Around

Something we all have to understand is that we must "go through." The reason we will have merit when our life is over is because we went through and conquered. In John's heavenly vision, he saw a great multitude from every nation standing before God's throne, clothed in white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. He was told they are those who "Went through the great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:14). In other words, it was the process of going through life on earth that led to their sanctification and victory. Psalm 23:4 tells us, "Even though I walk through the valley God is with me." We are not alone in our trials. God is walking with us and using the thorns of life to change us.

You may be fearful because of some situation in life. Remember God is always with you. This will help you to go through any situation with God's companionship. The dictionary defines the word "with" as: near to, alongside of, and in the company of. God is near you and you are not alone. Not only that, God is "in" you. In is closer than with!

Because God's presence is with and in you, you are capable of successfully facing any situation. No matter how hard the circumstance you must endure – divorce, difficult relationships, health problems and addictions – you can endure victoriously. Do not run from the hard things or try to go around what God puts in your path. God will be with you as you go through your situation. That's how you gain experience and come to know the ways of God in a deeply personal way.

Don't simply accept life, allow life to prod and challenge you. Look for meaning in everything, especially in your suffering. Choose to allow life to make you better. Don't abandon the struggle or give up! You will find yourself growing in acceptance and trust and surrender as you go through your experience. These trials are exactly what we need to tease virtue out of us and to diminish the pride which clings so closely.

All of us struggle and wrestle with life in this world. All of us have some form of thorns. Much like Jacob who wrestled with the angel of the Lord until he was blessed, we can find our trials becoming triumphs if we see the meaning of them and remain positive. Sufferings don't just happen. They are there for a reason and God will use them to bless us if we let him. As we surrender to God in our struggles, God is preparing us for our final surrender. Reach for the stars and maybe you will get the moon. But, if you don't reach for something, you won't achieve anything. We are made with God's DNA and that means we have the "stuff" of creativity and the longing to better ourselves.

How Do You Spell Ministry? W.O.R.K.

Strive to achieve your potential. Fight against laziness and a negative attitude. Resist being ordinary and lackluster. Try to avoid mediocrity. Don't just sit back and let everyone else accomplish. Be a participant and not a spectator. God is honored by sacrifice, risk, effort, creativity, work and goals. He then blesses our efforts and makes them fruitful according to his plan and will. You will never achieve your destiny if you are not willing to sacrifice.

Being the best means committing yourself to God. It means serving with enthusiasm, generosity and joy. It also means accepting others as they are and forgiving their foibles.

In addition, being the best means living a quality life in terms of character. There usually is three main areas of life that need work. The first area is our prayer life and developing our relationship with God. The second area is accepting others in our community setting. Finally, character development and growth in holiness is of utmost importance. The primary virtue we must grow in and become is **love**. If you want to be the best that you can be, you must strive for excellence in all these areas in your life: God, vocation, and virtue.

In order to make the most of your life, you must grow in maturity. Character development and growth will not just fall on you, you must work at them. If you see areas of your character that are flawed, ask yourself "How long am I going to be like this? Will I be acting the same way at this time next year? Do I want to live my whole life and die with this flaw in me? What do I need to do to change?" Try to draw lines in the sand and challenge yourself not to compromise in various areas. Moral integrity and the avoidance of sin are important. Self-control and self-discipline are so crucial in living a quality life. We naturally gravitate towards pleasure and comfort. Growth in holiness, however, will mean suffering as you exercise self-control.

Being the best we can be, and, preparing ourselves well for death and making the most out of our lives, requires working on our relationship with God, and striving to achieve our goals and dreams, and growing in character.

We are not being asked to be the best in the world. All we are being asked to do is to be the best that we can be. Do not become bitter if someone is better, but concentrate on reaching your own potential and achieving that. Do not concentrate on comparing yourself with others. You cannot be who they are. The truth dictates that we can never be the best in the world or the worst in the world, but to accept ourselves wherever we fall in between these two extremes.

In the parable of the talents, Jesus said that the servants were given "Five talents, two and one, each according to his ability." (Matthew 25:15). Notice, three different people were all given three different amounts of talents. In the Gospels, often there is a disparity when it comes to the generosity of God. (Matthew 20:1–16). Scripture never advocates competition, but does exalt ambition. You do not have to compare yourself to anyone else. You have your own unique and specific gifts and talents. God will guide you in the most effective way to develop your talent and potential to be the best that you can be in your vocation.

When you look back at the end of your life, you do not want to look back at what you could have been. You do not want to say to yourself, "I wish I had worked harder or been more creative or risked more." Mediocrity is not sufficient. Work hard to develop your full potential. Make no mistake about it, it is work! God has called us to live passionate, excellent lives. Make the most of your opportunities. Your efforts will come back to bless you and prepare you for your future. Fight the good fight, run the race and press on! If

the wind is against you, lean into it. Life is not a dress rehearsal. We only get one chance at this and we must make it count. Be committed to do your best for God!

If we try to do our best, we can look forward to rest when we hear the words of Jesus, "Well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master." (Matthew 25:21). Hearing those words will be the beginning of the ecstasies of heaven!

Grave Rubbings

We are not saved by our good works, but by the death and resurrection of Jesus on the cross for us. Being saved is more than just praying a prayer of surrender. It is a lifestyle of surrender in faith and in deeds, over and over, day by day, that justifies us and puts us right with God. It is our lifelong cooperation with God's grace and abandonment to his will that readies and prepares us for what is to come. We must keep asking ourselves, "Who is the person I want to become?" Having a goal of who we want to be will help us in our day-to-day choices.

In a near-death experience, your vision of God is meant to change you. It is meant to soften you. It is meant to grace you with the treasure of the gift of life. Coming face-to-face with God you understand you must break the chains of who you are, selfish, petty, cynical, grumbling and uncaring. We are not perfected, but continue on with the goal before us. We still have to make daily choices to love, treasure and appreciate our lives. It can be easy to revert to our "old" self. Knowing that one day we will come face-to-face with God helps to change you. "Lord, teach us to number our days and gain wisdom of heart." (Psalm 90:12).

Most tombstones have the person's name on them. If the deceased was religious there might be a quote such as "The Lord is my Shepherd." The tombstones of Christians almost all have some type of cross on them. Some even try to announce their philosophy of life or give advice. All, have the date of birth and the date of death with a hyphen or dash (–) separating them. The hyphen is perhaps the most important mark on the gravestone. God is not so much interested in the year you were born and the year you will die, he is interested in what happened in between. That little dash signifies everything that the person did in his or her life.

What will your dash contain?

You are writing the contents of your dash right now.



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