

"For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain"---- Philippians: 1:21).

We can be truly ourselves and free if God lives in us. This is what it means to be God's creature -- not to be a self-made, self-standing individual over against God, but to exist from God and through God. We are creatures precisely in that we live in God and God lives in us. We are sinful creatures when we fail to recognize this and live as if we were self-made, self-standing individuals. Being a new creature, redeemed from sin, is in this regard similar to being a creature as God originally created us to be. It's to live in Christ and to have Christ live in us. United with Christ, we live in God, and God lives in us.

--Miroslav Volf

Do you think much about what makes your life worth living? Hopefully, not many of you. Some of us are just not used to such philosophical questions. We are happy to just take life as it comes.

Others are so busy with family, work and other activities that those things supply more meaning than they know what to do with! In fact, the question of the meaning of life seldom comes up.

But there are also some people for whom the matter of what makes life worth living is a reoccurring nightmare . And it's not a question you can SIRI, or Google, like we do with all the other questions we have. These people agree with Mark Twain when he said, "The two most important days in your life are the day you are born, and the day you find out why." And some people, unfortunately, search their lives in vain to find their why.

Dr. Alice Flaherty, a leading neurologist at Massachusetts General Hospital, has suggested that "the ability to suppress thinking about questions like the meaning of life could -- arguably -- be part of the definition of mental health." In other words, to dwell so long on one matter in life makes it impossible for you to have any normal enjoyment of life, and, that is, perhaps a state of mental illness.

Paul's life after meeting Christ got a lot harder (if you have any doubt about that, see 2 Corinthians 11:24-33), but the meaning he found in serving Christ enabled him to face those troubles.

And we need to hear that, too. When we are in dark alleys or lonely valleys where we cannot see the meaning of our life, when the darkness around us is so thick that we cannot perceive a reason to keep struggling, we need to grab onto this: God has a meaning for our lives. We need to trust that. Whether we can see the way ahead or not, it is there. We just need to do our best.

And remember what Jesus said about the anxieties of life: "*But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things [what you need for life] will be given to you as well*" (Matthew 6:33).

We need to seek our place in God's kingdom. We need to go on loving God, following Jesus and loving our neighbor, and, in so doing, we will be living a meaningful life even though we may not be feeling it.

Some people we will find joy in living and, sometimes, others will not, but there is meaning in every life, and it lies in God, our Creator, and in his Son, Jesus.

We can hold onto that even when we are in deep emotional pain. Every life -- every life -- has meaning, and it lies with God. We should trust God, and go on living each precious moment we are given.

Lord, you give what we need as we need it. Your grace is not something we can make happen, and like the manna in the dessert, it's available on time, for us, every single day.

Sometimes we forget to give grace to ourselves. We struggle to receive the grace you give us. You give us time and space to feel the hard things and rest when needed. Help us to recognize when we need to receive your grace.

In all the challenges we face, your grace never departs. May we know this more fully. Amen

Devotion: Tuesday, March 31, 2020

In a storm of struggles, I have tried to control the elements, clasp the fist tight so as to protect self and happiness. But stress can be an addiction, and worry can be our lunge for control, and we forget the answer to this moment is always yes because of Christ.-----Ann Voskamp

1 John 5:1-6

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. ²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, ⁴for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. ⁵Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? ⁶This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

John was no guru, but he did travel with Jesus, step for step, for three years. In his writings he shares how to live according to the pattern of Christ. For John, the way to peace didn't involve swiping a credit card to get what we need; rather, it involved remembering the gift that God has already given us.

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God," says John (v. 1). If our ceaseless bad news reports are the source of much of our stress, John reminds us that the one

thing we really need is the knowledge of our status as children of God.

When we believe that Jesus is God's Son, it's that faith, that makes us part of his family. Every child of God who loves the parent, then, also loves the rest of his children (v. 2). If isolation during this time is what causes much of our stress, John reminds us that God has brought us together by giving us the gift of Jesus Christ and offering us a whole new community in which we can both give and receive the love God has shared with us. And that community is the church, whether face to face or email to email.

In a world in which a fire hose of information bombards us constantly, with little good news, obedience to the Word of God is the secret of a life with little stress. When we experience the gift of God's love and grace, it becomes the gift around which we pattern our lives. We focus on what we have, rather than what we don't have. We focus on the present, rather than worrying about the future. We know that our future is secure in Christ.

When we believe that Jesus has already conquered the world, we have nothing to fear from it!

The apostle Paul, echoes John when he reminds the Roman church that nothing, not even the stress-inducing specters of hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or the threat of violence, can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. Paul says, "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). Peace is possible because the battle's already been won. Jesus himself declares it: "I have said this to you, so that in me you will have peace. In the world, you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!" (John 16:33).

Each of us deals with stress, but it need not be debilitating. We can read a book, from home, watch a movie, from home, take a walk outside, alone, and hopefully watch a worship service from home.

Ultimately, however, real stress relief comes from knowing that God loves us with an everlasting love, and that God has already conquered the world.

We've already been given the gift of peace -- and it's stressless

Let us pray:

(NOTE: Pace this prayer very slowly with long pauses indicated by //.)

How easy it is for us to run away from you, O God, // and run toward all of the things in our lives we think we need to do. // In this time of prayer, turn our minds away from thinking to just being. // Let us breathe in the calmness of your presence and breathe out the chattering in our minds. // Breathe in quietude; breathe out trivia. // Breathe in peacefulness. // Breathe out minutiae which clamors for our attention. // In the stillness of your certain presence, let us sit and breathe deeply of the peace that is ours through the breath of the Holy Spirit. // This is always ours, always available: We have only to be still and make room for God. // Amen.