

The Making of a Life

By William MacDonald

It is good to remind ourselves often that life is like a coin. We can spend it any way we want. But we can spend it only once. Therefore it is of great importance that we frequently stop to reflect on what should go in to the making of a life. I have tried to list some of the considerations that seem to be crucial in this regard.

Have I successfully differentiated between my daily work and my calling? For most people, their secular employment should be a means to put food on the table, a roof over their head, and to give money to the work of the Lord. The job is honorable and necessary, but is not the main thing. The Lord Jesus was a carpenter, but that was not His calling. The great aim of his life was to seek and to save that which was lost. Paul was a tentmaker by trade, but he was called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. God never intended that anyone should be born a man and die a grocer.

When a large oil company approached a missionary to be their representative, they could not understand his diffidence. Three times they raised their offer, and three times he refused. "What's wrong?" they asked, "Isn't the salary enough?" He replied, "Your price is all right but the job is too small. God has called me to be a missionary."

I should ask myself, "Is the main thrust of my life of consequence in the light of eternity?" Henry Bosch wrote, "The believer is exhorted to turn away from the hundred—and—one illusive ambitions that captivate worldly people, ranging from the desire for fame to the longing for temporary pleasure and earthly wealth. Instead, he is admonished to dedicate himself to Christ and strive for eternal treasures." He is a fool if all his plans end at the grave.

Dr. Barnhouse said, "Our life should be lived in the light of eternity. A hundred years from now, where will you and I be? Surely we should learn to live, not for the obscurity of these misty moments, but for the luminous and all revealing light which shall shine through all our motives and our being far more clearly than any x-ray shines through the flesh of our bodies."

Jenny Lind, the famous Swedish opera singer, was converted in New York and soon thereafter decided to leave the stage for ever. One day a friend found her sitting on the beach with an open Bible in her lap. The friend asked why she had left such a brilliant career. Jenny replied; "With each passing day, show business made me think less of my Bible and hardly anything at all of what lies beyond this life — so what else could I do?"

Another way of putting it is this: Will the results of my work go on after I'm gone? Someone said that every person owes it to himself to provide himself with some honorable work while his body is lying in the grave. When I pass off the scene, either through death or the rapture, will it be said of me, "It was if he had not lived at all?"

I should ask myself. "Is my work making such claims on my time and strength that the Lord's interests are crowded out?" There may come a time in my profession when I have to say, "Thus far shall your proud waves come and no farther," when I must refuse a promotion and a raise in pay in order to fill my role in the local assembly.

From time to time I should check myself on this: Am I motivated by covetousness in business - the incessant desire for more, for a higher standard of living? Many are no longer satisfied

just to keep up with the Joneses: they want to lead the pack. It is a trap that makes us "satisfied to be minor officials in transient enterprises." We are content to be experts in underwater basket weaving while above us burns the vision of the Christ upon the Cross. Every Christian couple should sit down and decide on a standard of living that they'd be satisfied with in order to put everything above that in the work of the Lord. That is what is known as living by faith.

Sometimes we are sidetracked by fame. I ask myself, "Am I motivated by the honors of the world? Speaking at graduation exercises at McGill University, Rudyard Kipling advised the students not to care too much for money, power, or fame. "Some day you will meet a man who cares for none of these things, and then you will realize how poor you are!" The Lord Jesus is that Man, whether or not Kipling knew it. The Savior made Himself of no reputation. Anyone who lives for this world's honors is selling his birthright for a mess of pottage. Imagine giving one's best for a ribbon, a plaque, a gold cup! One man who lived for these things said when his sun was setting, "The dream of the reality was better than the reality of the dream."

A former athlete said, "The biggest thrill of my life was when I first scored the decisive goal in a big match and heard the roar of the cheering crowds. But in the quiet of my room that night, a sense of the futility of it swept over me. After all, what was it worth? Was there nothing better to live for than to score goals?"

Another consideration is this: Does my work involve me in anything that is legally or ethically questionable? A Christian can serve in any honorable occupation - but it must be honorable. Advertising the superiority of a product when no such superiority exists doesn't qualify. The Lord abominates false weights and measures. Adam Clark's boss told him to stretch the silk when he was measuring it out for a customer. Clark said, "Sir, your silk may stretch, but my conscience won't" Later God used Adam to write a commentary on the Bible. We are faced with numerous temptations to compromise, especially when it comes to money. We all need "a conscience live and keen to sense the first approach of sin."

I should also consider whether my work is in any way harmful to the moral, physical, or spiritual welfare of others. For example, how can I, as a Christian, sell or serve hard liquor when I know that it is worse to make a drunkard than to be one? How can I sell tobacco when I know that it is a carcinogen? I would be selling cancer by the carton. How can I sell lottery tickets when I would be catering to the covetousness of the human heart?

Finally, I ask myself, "Do I feel frustrated by the futility of the way I am spending my life?" When Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones left medicine to preach the Gospel, his friends couldn't understand it. Let him tell the story. "People said to me, 'Why give up good work - a good profession - after all, the medical profession, why give that up? If you had been a bookie, for instance, and wanted to give that up to preach the gospel, we should understand and agree with you and say that you were doing a grand thing, But medicine - a good profession, healing the sick and relieving pain!' One man even said this, 'If you were a solicitor and gave it up, I'd give you a pat on the back, but to give up medicine!' Ah well, I felt like saying to them, 'If you knew more about the work of a doctor, you would understand. We but spend most of our time rendering people fit to go back to their sin!' I saw men on their sick beds, I spoke to them of their immortal souls, they promised grand things. Then they got better and back they went to their old sin! I saw I was helping these men to sin and I decided I would do no more of it. I want to heal souls. If a man has a diseased body and his soul is all right, he is all right to the end; but a man with a healthy body and a diseased soul is all right for sixty years or so and

then he has to face an eternity of hell. Ah yes! we have sometimes to give up those things which are good for that which is best of all -- the joy of salvation and newness of life."

I always have to chuckle when I think of what C. T. Studd's friends said to him when God called him to the mission field. "You're mad, leaving your cricket and going to be a missionary. Couldn't you wait until you've finished your cricketing days? Couldn't you make more of an impact for God as a cricketer? Why go as a missionary to a place where they have never even heard of cricket?" But Studd was leaving futility in order to find meaning. He was leaving fantasy in order to find reality.

As servants of Jesus Christ, we have no right to spend our lives straightening pictures in a burning house or rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. "When the world about you is in great danger, works that in themselves are not sinful can be quite wrong" (Corrie Ten Boom).

I close with a searching question asked by Michael Griffith; "What will we have to show for our life? Will it be measured by life's little rewards and successes, some certificates of education, some silver cups indicative of athletic prowess, a few medals, some newspaper cuttings, promotion within our profession, some status in the local community, a presentation clock on retirement, an obituary notice, and a well attended funeral? Is that all that our life will have meant?"

To prevent that from being all, I do well to face up to the foregoing considerations that go into the making of a life that counts.