

On a Snowy Day

Seize the moment and discover a life rich with meaning and purpose.

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In the time of David, a man named Benaiah fought for Israel with legendary valor. Named among David's mighty men,¹ Benaiah's feats of heroism earned his promotion to captain of David's bodyguard. He defeated not just one but two of Moab's best warriors. Later, armed with only a club against a giant Egyptian fighter (7' 6" tall), Benaiah wrested his opponent's enormous spear away from him and killed him with it. Perhaps most amazing is Benaiah's victory against the king of beasts: "He also went down and struck down a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen."²

The biblical record of his life shows Benaiah's bravery and brawn forged together for a greater purpose – an admirable legacy to inspire us even today.

Contrast that with this true obituary about a woman who was born in 1929 and died in 2008:

... born in 1929 in New Mexico, she left us on August 7, 2008. She will meet by in the afterlife by her husband, her son and a daughter She had no hobbies, made no contribution to society and rarely shared a kind word or deed in her life. I speak for the majority of her family when I say her presence will not be missed by many, very few tears will be shed and there will be no lamenting over her passing There will be no service, no prayers and no closure for the family she spent a lifetime tearing apart. We cannot come together in the end to see to it that her grandchildren and great-grandchildren can say their goodbyes. So I say here for all of us, "GOOD-BYE, MOM."

A life wasted.

None of us know for sure how long we will live; how many more laps around the sun are ahead of us. But all of us can choose whether to use all we have for a greater purpose as Benaiah did, or to waste it selfishly as the woman above did.

My objective here is to convey this simple message: Don't waste *your* life. Live generously. In the words of King Solomon,

There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more,
And there is one who withholds what is justly due,
and yet it results only in want.
The generous man will be prosperous,
And he who waters will himself be watered³.

This seems counterintuitive, but this is the only way for us to truly blossom. Solomon lived in an agrarian culture and referred to the law of the harvest to teach us how to make the most of our life: share it — generously.

We are like seeds in a bag. We can choose to remain in the bag and never grow, or we can choose to be scattered as seeds are meant to be. Then, not only will we come to life ourselves, but also see our lives bear much fruit!

God said through the prophet Haggai to the Israelites, "Is the seed still in the barn? Even including the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree, it has not borne fruit. Yet from this day on I will bless you."⁴ If a farmer fails to

¹ 2 Samuel 23:8-39

² 1 Chronicles 11:22

³ Proverbs 11:24-25 (NASB)

⁴ Haggai 2:19 (NASB)

scatter the seed by keeping it in the barn, there will be no life. But the moment you choose to be generous with your life, it will begin to blossom the way God designed.

Jesus said it this way to His followers:

“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”⁵

My hardest – and best – life lesson

This way of life first became personal to me during my college days. My girlfriend and I spent a day together along the shores of Lake Erie outside of Cleveland, my hometown. On that beautiful day, we relished one another's company and every moment felt special. As we walked along the lake's shore, we noticed many small rocks with a variety of colors glimmering in the sunshine. We stepped ankle deep into the water and picked out a few of those colorful rocks.

Days later, I decided to enjoy a walk with the Lord along the same lake. At the place where colorful rocks still glimmered, I got distracted. Instead of focusing on Jesus, I started thinking about my girlfriend and how pleased she would be if I took some of those rocks back to her. I chose two rocks and started to walk back when I felt a prompting in my heart to throw the rocks into the water. I stopped ... but then I decided to continue walking toward home. Again, I felt prompted to throw the rocks back in the water. *Is the Holy Spirit prompting me? No, that's a crazy idea.* I continued walking until I was prompted a third time to throw the rocks back.

Finally, I stopped dead in my tracks and looked at the two rocks. I threw the rock that I liked the least back into the lake, but I kept the more colorful rock.

At home, I put the colorful rock in the foyer by my front door to make sure I wouldn't forget it. The next day when I reached for it, I noticed something. During the night, the rock had dried and all of the color was gone! It was just an ordinary brown rock. Then the words of Jesus resonated in my heart: “He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.”⁶

I realized that I was clinging to my relationship with my girlfriend and putting her before the Lord. I was holding on to her, not wanting to lose her. Having this experience and a few more like it (I am a slow learner), I began to understand that I needed to — that I *had* to — give this relationship to the Lord with “an open hand;” to relinquish my plans and desires and instead follow God's leading for that relationship. It took time, but finally on one of my walks with the Lord, I “opened my hand” and gave God the most valuable treasure of my heart: that relationship. I said to Him, “Lord, I give her to you. I give my heart to you. If you keep her in my life that would be awesome, but don't do as I desire but as You desire.”

That was one of my roughest and toughest life lessons, but it also was the most freeing. I now realize that to fully experience life as God intends for me to, I will have many “crucifixions” of my heart along the way. These crucifixions are necessary for the soil of my heart to become fertile for God's way and word to do its transforming work in my life.

Don't waste your life.

Take up your cross daily and follow Christ. Memorize Luke 9:23 below and hand over your will, your desires and your agenda, and take up God's way and God's will as your very own.

“If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”

⁵ Matthew 16:24-26 (NASB)

⁶ Matthew 10:39; Luke 17:33; John 12:25

How do you view life: secularly or spiritually?

The word *secular* means things that concern the present world; the here and now. There is no room for the spiritual, sacred or supernatural. There is nothing beyond molecules and matter. There is no life after the grave.

Is this how you view life?

The line below represents a person's life of 70 to 80 years or so, followed by the grave. Notice there is nothing after the grave. Death is the ultimate and absolute end in a secular view of life.



If you view life this way, then you have nothing spiritual to live for. As the Apostle Paul told the Corinthian believers, "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'"⁷ For a secularist, there is no ultimate meaning or purpose to life. It's all a freak of nature.

If you are a secularist who is truly honest and consistent with that worldview, it will lead to the denial of a personal and eternal God who is providentially and sometimes supernaturally involved in His creation. You will travel down the road of naturalism where there is nothing beyond the material world and everything is determined by chemical reactions. If you sincerely embrace this view, you will tumble down into the despair of nihilism where you find that not only is God dead, but so is man. You will be forced to try to convince yourself that there is meaning, thus you will make up your own meaning.

But, if you view life spiritually, then you will not only embrace the here and now but you will also welcome the idea that there is more to life than just molecules. You will understand that molecules matter because this life is not a freak of nature. There is purpose, meaning and significance to this massive universe, this obscure planet and your life of 70 to 80 years or so. You will discover that death is not the end of the story, but the end of a *chapter* in the story you have role in.

The diagram below illustrates that life continues, though on a higher plane than before:



The grave is not final. It is the dressing room for eternity. You have been created by the personal and eternal God in His image to live in fellowship with Him, to enjoy Him and to fulfill all that He has planned for His creation. You are not here at this time by accident. You are not a freak of random processes. You are a member of the human race which is unique from everything else in this universe. Rocks, animals, planets, molecules — none of these have a self-awareness, a self-consciousness, a self-determination, or a sense of right and wrong as humans do.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:32b

Why is this? Stones, trees, rivers, mountains, mammals, bugs, birds, and all other created things don't ask questions. But you do. Why is this?

Because you are more than a collection of molecules. You are made in the image of God and you matter to God. Don't waste your life.

Since you are reading this booklet, I assume you probably have a spiritual view of life. You probably can agree with me that there is life after death as proven by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You probably have received Jesus Christ as your leader and rescuer. You probably understand that eternal life is not just an infinite amount of time, but it is having a relationship with God that will last forever! You may understand that how you live your life now will impact and affect your life and responsibilities in the age to come. In other words, these days are training days for reigning days.

God is training you, developing you, molding, shaping and transforming you to make you fit for the eternal country. God uses the pressures, deadlines, circumstances, people, successes, failures, joys, disappointments, the good, the bad, and the weird to form you and fit you for His eternal purposes. God allows challenges to come into your life to stretch you. That is how you grow. Growth doesn't happen by holding on to comfort.

But even though you believe all this, are you living like it? Or are you living day by day more like a secularist? Are you living for yourself and not for Christ? Are you living for comfort and hiding from challenge? Do you find that even though you hold a spiritual view of life, you live like a secularist? If so, you are wasting your life.

Adopt the motto of the Apostle Paul: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."⁸ Pursue Jesus Christ. Get to know Him personally. Don't just hear stories about Him. Journey through the Old Testament as it looks eagerly to who the Savior would be. Travel through the gospels and discover what Jesus really was like. Walk through the epistles and grow in your understanding of Him as these letters explain Him. Ponder the book of Revelation as it reveals Him and expects Him.

Only those whose life is defined by Christ can say that in death they will have gain.

If your life is money, you will lose it when you die.

If your life is fame, you will lose it when you die.

If your life is pleasure, you will lose it when you die.

If your life is Christ, you will gain more of Him when you die, and along with Him will come pleasures forever and true riches eternal.

Don't waste your life on yourself. Live with Christ. Live for Christ.

Invest your life generously

Some people think of generosity as an event. Instead, we need to think of it as an attitude of our heart so that generosity becomes a way of life.

Why is this important? Becoming generosity is a character quality that God wants to develop in each of us. God is generous. He is generous with His love, His mercy, His forgiveness, His grace, and even with His holiness. The author of Hebrews tells us that God wants to share His holiness.⁹ We are made in His image, meaning that we are to resemble and reflect His character in our character.

Generosity is one of the most important character lessons God teaches us because it helps fertilize the soil of our heart for other godly character qualities to blossom. How can you grow in love or care and concern for others if you are a selfish person at heart? How can you see and meet the needs of others if your interests are only in yourself?

⁸ Philippians 1:21 (NASB)

⁹ Hebrews 12:10

Generosity doesn't come naturally. How many children do you know who were born with a generous spirit? I know of none, including me. My experience with my own children and grandchildren and a number of other people's children is this: Generosity is not part of their vocabulary or nature. Generosity is a quality that needs to be taught in a real life context, not in a classroom. It is crucial for children to see generosity modeled by their parents. If we don't train our children to be generous and instill it as a character quality, they will grow up with their natural tendency toward selfishness. Selfishness will rule their day and their life.

So the question is, how can we model a lifestyle of generosity that others can follow?

Let's look at how the Apostle Paul told the believers at Ephesus to walk. The word for *walk* that he used in his letter to them means to make a thorough investigation of how you are living your life. Five times in Ephesians, Paul commanded them how to walk. Here's how you can do it too, step by step:

1. "... Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called."¹⁰

Your life is no longer your own. You have been bought with the precious blood of the Lamb. Your life belongs to Jesus. God has called you to be in relationship with Him and God has a specific calling on your life for you to live out with Him. As you pursue God and live in a healthy community of believers and grow in your character, you will discover God's calling on your life.

2. "Walk no longer just as the Gentiles [or unbelieving] also walk, in the futility of their mind."¹¹

The unbelieving world lives for comfort, not transformation. They choose a self-centered life instead of a God-centered life. They spend and use time for their personal ambitions rather than learning how to invest time in the here and now *and* in eternity.

3. "Walk in love."¹²

The Greek word for love that Paul used is *agape*. This kind of love is a sacrificial, as indicated by the rest of the verse. The pattern and the model for sacrificial love is our Master Jesus Christ. Jesus said we are to love each other in the same way He has loved us. This is the standard. This is the kind of love that will not only impact our lives and relationships but the kind of apologetic that will shake the world.

4. "Walk as children of light."¹³

We used to belong to the rule of darkness and live in moral corruption, but now we are children of light. "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."¹⁴ We are to live as light in this spiritually darkened world so that when others see us, they will be pointed to the Heavenly Father who longs for them to come home.¹⁵ The Apostle Paul said very seriously, "Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame."¹⁶

5. "Walk carefully."¹⁷

In this section of his letter, Paul explained how. First, we must walk according to wisdom. We discern wisdom if we have the mindset of making the most of our time. The King James Version uses the phrase

¹⁰ Ephesians 4:1

¹¹ Ephesians 4:17

¹² Ephesians 5:2

¹³ Ephesians 5:8

¹⁴ 1 John 1:5 (NASB)

¹⁵ Matthew 5:16; Philippians 2:15

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:34 (ESV)

¹⁷ Ephesians 5:15

“redeem the time.” In this context, the word “redeem” means to buy up for yourself. The Greek word for time is *kairos*. It does not mean chronological time, but an opportune time. Essentially Paul said to make the most of every opportunity (as translated in the New International Version).

Walking in all five of these ways is vital because, as Paul said, “the days are evil.”¹⁸ We are living in dangerous and serious times. Therefore, all the more, we must make the most of each day the Lord gives us. The age we live in is not a playground but a battleground. In the days of apostate Israel, Elisha’s servant Gehazi deceptively accumulated a “bunch of stuff” from Namaan, captain of the Syrian army. Elisha confronted Gehazi and said, “Is it a time to receive money and to receive clothes and olive groves and vineyards and sheep and oxen and male and female servants?”¹⁹

Good question. Is it a time to make our lives comfortable and waste time until Jesus returns? Or is it time to fire up our desire for Christ and His passion? Isn’t time to do what is just, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God?²⁰

So, how can we make the most of every opportunity? Paul urged Christians not to be mindless, stupid or rash. Instead, we are to use our minds to discover what God is up to and then join Him!

The place to start is to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit. It is here that you will find a wellspring of wisdom, insight and empowerment for a well-lived before the face of God. Are you living well?

Treat every day as an opportunity

“I will prepare, and some day my chance will come.” – Abraham Lincoln

In 1965, The Beatles sang John Lennon’s song, “Nowhere Man.” It described a man with no roots, no perspective and no direction.

Are you a bit like Nowhere Man, lacking a point of view or any clue about what to do?

Benaiah certainly was not. As one of King David’s mighty men, he lived a life of purpose, not passivity; a life of action, not idleness. That’s why he became skilled enough to overpower larger opponents: he remained a man in training every single day. Remember that intriguing passage about his life: “He also went down and killed a lion inside a pit on a snowy day.”²¹ Why did he do that?

Think about it. What would you do on a snowy day? What do you think the rest of Israel did on that snowy day? I suggest that the Israelites stayed indoors and waited out the storm. Not Benaiah. He said to himself, “Look, it’s snowing. I think I’ll go fetch myself a lion.”

What did he do? He redeemed the time. He didn’t allow even one day to go wasted but instead sharpened his skills as a warrior. He understood the treacherous times in which he lived. He dedicated himself and all that he had to making David king over Israel. There was no time to waste or to let his skills become rusty. For Benaiah, doing so could easily have made the crucial difference between life or death not only for himself, also for David whom he had vowed to protect.

We often hear the phrase, “Make hay while the sun is shining.” And we should. But we should also go into a pit on a snowy day and kill a lion. What do you do on a snowy day? Be like Benaiah and make the most of your time. Enlarge your heart. Sharpen your mind. Deepen your relationships. Expand your soul.

¹⁸ Ephesians 5:16

¹⁹ 2 Kings 5:26 (NASB)

²⁰ Micah 6:8

²¹ 1 Chronicles 11:22 (NASB)

1. On a snowy day, *spiritually* seek God in the Scriptures.

Have a reading plan and stick to it. Meditate and pray over the Scriptures, then write down your thoughts, questions and insights. Add margin to your life: space, rest and breathing room in your weekly schedule for a time of silence before the Lord where you can listen to Him. What are you doing to seek the Author of your life? What are you doing to see to it that God is the first love of your heart?

2. On a snowy day, *relationally* get connected to a healthy community of believers and share your life.

Find a mentor. Be a mentor. Deepen a relationship or pursue reconciliation of a relationship. Share the gospel. What are you doing to strengthen, grow, deepen, and renew relationships in your life?

3. On a snowy day, *intellectually* read all genres of literature.

Read history. Read biographies. Read world news. Read theology. Read! Learn a new language. Teach a course. Take a course. Increase your vocabulary. What are you doing to challenge yourself mentally?

4. On a snowy day, *experientially* learn a new skill.

Improve your abilities. Improve your health through good nutrition and regular exercise. Discover what God is passionate about that also stirs you, and then join Him in that cause. What cause are you living for that is bigger than yourself?

These things won't "just happen." You must take personal responsibility ... even on a snowy day.
Don't waste your life.

Carefully read the Apostle Paul's words once again from The Message translation by Eugene Peterson:

"So watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times! Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants. Don't drink too much wine. That cheapens your life. Drink the Spirit of God, huge draughts of him. Sing hymns instead of drinking songs! Sing songs from your heart to Christ. Sing praises over everything, any excuse for a song to God the Father in the name of our Master, Jesus Christ. Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another."²²

Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow.

²² Ephesians 5:15-21 (The Message)