

The Circle of Life

The typical wide brimmed Chinese hat he wears is wrapped in ancient plastic wrap and shades a face that is aged and downcast. He stands or rather stoops in a surreal contrast to the flashy, young and sensuous billboards and 30 foot high advertisements for Esprit, Top Girl, Totally Jo-Jo and the hundreds of other false boastings of a modern materialistic world which is quiet now but only a few hours earlier was bustling with crowds of people shopping, flirting, seeking gain.

I gently wagged my head and thought, 'What a life.'

Life – I don't think we really 'get it'. I don't think we really understand what life truly is. Consider... As the actors beheld a beautiful sunset and drank their beer, the old commercial used to say, "It don't get any better than this." And many people think of life in such terms.

Clearly, the overwhelming majority think of life as the pursuit of pleasure. In fact, it's common, when we're stuck in an unpleasurable routine, to hear someone say, "Hey, get a life!"

But life is not primarily 'biological'. It's just that 'biology' so to speak -- the physical world and its values -- are easier for us to deal with, to perceive and identify. Neither is life simply existence; you and I will exist forever, but we know that eternal existence will be either eternal life or eternal death. So there's another more fundamental quality of 'life' to consider.

And I don't think we really 'get it' – but we should definitely try. The Apostle Paul admonished the early church saying, "...you should no longer walk as the rest of the gentiles (unbelievers) walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened being alienated from the life of God..." (Ephesians 4:17,18)

The very fact that he made this statement shows that we as believers can have the same misunderstanding about life as unbelievers.

So what is life – really? And why does it matter? To the one who has never tasted the goodness of God, never been 'born again' through faith in Christ, any attempt to communicate this will make no sense. It will be like describing the most incredible sunset to someone born blind.

Randy Alcorn, in his novel "Deadline", put it this way – his character Finney is ushered into Heaven –

*"The crowd visible beyond the passageway grew with each step he took. Some faces he did not recognize, many he did. He took the last step – or was it the first – and entered the new world. As he came out the end – or was it the beginning – over the threshold, he gasped his first breath of heaven's air. The gasp was a gasp of wonder at the beauty of this place, and the magnificence of its inhabitants. ... Many hands grabbed Finney's, which he stretched out toward them, as if to confirm they were real. He must have some sort of body, since he could feel their touch. This struck a chord of familiarity. It had happened before. Or something very much like it. Yes, of course, when he was born into the other world. The passageway had been the birth canal between earth and heaven. And these were the midwives of heaven, supervising his birth, pulling him into the world, fussing over him and proudly presenting him to his new family. **This was the real world, which he'd been no more capable of imagining before than an unborn child can imagine the infinite wonders that lie beyond the womb.**"*

Now, the Bible uses two terms for what we have translated as "life". Their meanings are the same in both Greek and Hebrew, the original languages. However, they represent to the

discerning heart, things that are worlds apart.

The first term comes from the word to breathe and means a breathing creature. In scripture, it always refers to earthly life. A few examples are:

*Mat 6:25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your **life**, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not **life** more than food and the body more than clothing?"*

*Mat 10:39 He who finds his **life** will lose it, and he who loses his **life** for My sake will find it. ...*

*John 10:15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My **life** for the sheep.*

The second term means life or vitality and is the word always used in referring to the eternal quality. A few examples are:

*Mat 7:14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to **life**, and there are few who find it.*

*Luke 12:15 And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's **life** does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."*

*John 1:4 In Him was **life**, and the life was the light of men.*

*John 5:24 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting **life**, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into **life**.*

*John 10:10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have **life**, and that they may have it more abundantly.*

*Genesis 2:7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of **life**; and man became a **living** being.*

Now, Jesus in His great "I am..." statements used this second term to describe Himself seven times, twice as much as any other attribute. (e.g. John 6:48, John 14:6, John 11:25). And God Almighty is specifically referred to as the

"living God" 30+ times in scripture – more than any other descriptor. So clearly, this is of paramount importance.

In fact, I'll suggest that it is THE theme of God's plan and purpose for man. It was the very thing we forfeited in Eden and the very thing we have had restored through the cross of Calvary. Life!

What happened back in the garden of Eden? We died.

You see, by Adam and Eve, we broke off, detached, separated, became alienated from our Creator. Death is exactly that – separation from God. We say an electrical circuit is dead when it is open or separated from the flow of power. In a similar way, we lost connection with our Source, the essence of life; apart from Him, we rot and decay in every way. (As a matter of fact, we call it the Second Law of Thermodynamics - a law of physics.)

As a result, what does the world consider to be 'life'? Really, it can be summed up in four letters, s-e-l-f. Self satisfaction, self gratification, self absorption, self realization, self will, self-ishness. Every attribute or quality of what the world thinks of as life is tied to self and thus separated from God.

And analogous to the scene of my companion on the early morning streets of Taipei, many of us are generally inclined to consider life just as a spectrum of worldly opportunities ranging from the poor have-nots to the blissful, binge-ing gotta-haves. But in reality, life, real life, is not even on this plane.

As we study scripture, it's obvious that the closer you are to the Lord, the more connected, the more intimate (John 17:3), the more LIFE you have; consider the four creatures immediately surrounding God's throne in heaven. These are the most privileged created beings of all. Notice, what is their common identifier? (See Revelation 4)

They are LIVING! Could God be any more obvious?

You know, in my ignorance, I used to think of these creatures as somewhat robotic or mindless to continually be saying, "Holy, holy, holy. Lord, God Almighty. Who was and is and is to come." When in fact, they are just the opposite. Their incredibly outstanding intellect affords them the ability to comprehend, which leads to their awe and in turn, leads to their continual worship.

No, I don't think we 'get it', but we can – we'll 'get it' as we get it. Got it?

If you have a loving, believing, submitted relationship with Jesus Christ, eternal LIFE will one day soon stun you with joy indescribable. When you are in His embrace, you will know, perfectly, that everything is right – everything – I said everything.

- I'm not talking about some blissful forgetfulness, but the actual tangible understanding of truth, the grasping of His accomplished plan.
- I'm not talking about some feigned obligatory posture of praise in spite of pain but an actual overwhelming change and restoration of your spirit, soul and body as well as ALL that pertains to your joy.
- I'm not talking about a temporary emotional swing or flirtatious affair with glee but a completed work, a never-fading, always-dawning, ever-lasting, ever-expanding gift from God.
Moses, in the Old Testament put it this way, "Choose life!" (Deut 30:19,20) That is, consciously allow God's Spirit to draw you into the closer, more connected, more intimate relationship with Him. Pursue this course with wild abandon of self (and expect the world to think you're nuts!). You have nothing to fear – He's not too busy for you; He'll never leave you; His thoughts about you are without number and are for your good. It's in this relationship and the never ending pursuit

for more of God that we comprehend and enjoy life. We GET it.

*...to know Him is to love Him ... is to Know Him is to Love Him ... is to KNOW HIM is to LOVE HIM... **IS TO KNOW HIM IS TO LOVE HIM...** This is the circle of life!*

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

You can begin a relationship with your Father in heaven by simply praying and asking Him to forgive your sins, to send the Spirit of His Son, Jesus Christ, in to your heart. Confess, receive and believe that Jesus died for your sins and rose again from the grave. It's that simple. If you haven't already – do it now.