

Finishing Well
A conversation about living for Jesus on the back nine of life

Conversation Eight: An Overview of All Our Conversations

The Concept of a Safe Landing

You see, life is like an airplane journey. No matter how good the takeoff, no matter how good the flight, if you have a crash landing, then it was all for nothing. I'm coming in for the landing now; the most important part of my life is just beginning.

—Soichiro Honda (founder of the Honda Motor Company)



Do you think this concept is biblical?

1. Some Key Verses

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 (NIV) We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. ⁴ Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 (NIV) With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. ¹² We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalms 90:12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

2 Peter 3:10-11 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives...

Jude 1:24-25 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

2. Finishing Well

2 Tim. 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

The terms “finishing well” and “finish well” have to do with the idea of being faithful in our spiritual lives, in our spiritual journey as Christ followers, until the very end of our lives. The sad fact is that many people don’t “finish well.” We have all known people who started off strong in their Christian faith, their Christian walk, and then years later have fallen away or moved to the sidelines as passive spectators in the Christian life. They no longer walk in a close relationship with Christ. They, like the church at Ephesus, could easily be described as having “lost your first love” (Rev 2:4).

It is always sad to see these one-time faithful followers of Christ who, for whatever reason, have moved into complacency or, even worse, denial of their faith. There are many reasons we see people “plateau” or “stall” in their Christian growth and development. Some succumb to a persistent, controlling sin. Others suffer from a kind of spiritual “burnout” where they just seem too tired to go on. Others simply get more and more distracted by the love of the things of this world (1 Jn 2:15-16). For whatever reason they run out of gas, pull over to the side of the road, or leave the race all together.

The challenge to “finish well” is a strong reminder to all of us that to do so requires a clear, intentional commitment

on our part. Nobody ever finished well by accident. Finishing well no doubt has many parts, but we focused on three. **F³** has to do with finishing well. It involves **faithfulness**, **freshness**, and **fruitfulness**. Faithfulness has to do with being "faithful," being true, staying the course until the end of your life. Freshness has to do with staying fresh in our love for and experience of the life of Christ. It has to do with staying close to Jesus and maintaining that freshness in our friendship and relationship with Him. Fruitfulness has to do with remaining fruitful, being used by God in the development and encouragement of other's spiritual lives. What a wonderful truth that God can use us in the development and encouragement of other's spiritual lives.

A few thoughts on finishing well...

- David, the man after God's own heart, did not finish well; he had a so-so finish.
- David had several major "blind spots" in his life that he never dealt with.
- Our point of greatest need will also be our point of greatest vulnerability in ignoring moral, legal and ethical boundaries.
- Our shipwrecks will hurt others; if our ship goes down, we won't go down alone, we will take family and friends with us.
- We must keep focused on Jesus, because we don't know where the finish line is.
- In the Christian life, it is not how you start that matters; it is how you finish.
- Four types of finishes in life: 1. cut off (premature death); 2. poorly; 3. so-so; 4. well.
- Finishing well is not impossible, but it is challenging. Many people don't finish well.
- What makes me believe that I will be the exception to the rule and finish well?
- The object of our feelings and desire, that which looks so good and exciting now, will not be worth the cost. "I never felt this way before."
- Many men in living out their later years get sloppy spiritually and put their spiritual lives on "cruise control." They finish, but not well.
- Life is a marathon, not a sprint, slow and steady is better than periodic short bursts of speed.
- We should ask God to reveal our "blind spots" and then deal with them.
- A good philosophy for this stage in life: Slow the pace. Narrow the focus. Invest wisely. (Invest wisely not in terms of financial investments but in terms of people investments.)
- A declining spiritual life is rarely a "spiritual blow out." When our spiritual lives decline, they almost always are "slow leaks," hardly perceptible. We step away from the Lord Jesus one baby step at a time. While at the same time telling ourselves that each step further away is "no big deal."

3. Living for Jesus on the back nine of life

2 Chron. 14:2-4 Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God. ³He removed the foreign altars and the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. ⁴He commanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, and to obey his laws...

2 Chron. 16:12 In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the Lord, but only from the physicians.

A few thoughts on living on the back nine...

- All of us still have great contributions to make in life in the later years of their lives. The contribution will be the culmination of our "life work."
- The reality of the "second adulthood" for those from age 45-80 is an exciting reality in today's world.
- Retirement and old age are good times in our lives.
- We should step away from our safety nets and out of our comfort zones. We should take risks during our retirement years to be sure we finish well and faithfully.
- We can miss opportunities in our retirement years by staying put, holding on too tightly to our current situation, and/or refusing to change.
- Not all endings are happy. There is a lot of pain and hurt out there.
- The passions of your early years will not carry you through your retirement years. You need to renew your passions in your later years. You need to wake up and smell the coffee. What are the things, ideas, and/or people that give you energy and excitement? Give yourself to those.
- In your retirement years you have three choices in regard to being passionate about important things. You

can

- (1) live without passion (passionless; flatlined)
- (2) choose an alternate passion (e.g., get a motorcycle, or run off with a blond)
- (3) renew your passion for Christ (those who finish well)
- We should live our later years of life with sufficient margin (instead of living a “marginless” life)
 - Marginless brings fatigue...margin brings energy.
 - Marginless brings red ink...margin brings black ink.
 - Marginless brings hurry...margin brings calm.
 - Marginless brings anxiety...margin brings security.
 - Marginless is cultural...margin is countercultural.
 - Marginless is a disease of our time...margin is its cure.
- We should live carefully and proactively in retirement. It’s not a time to just let things happen to us.
- Our retirement years are not to be a rerun/replay of our early years. They are supposed to be better, with a focus on things we really care about.
- Spiritual plateauing or coasting over the finish line is a problem for many.
- In golf the game can be won or lost on the back nine. Is this also true of the Christian life?
- In our retirement years we begin to see life in terms of the time left rather than the time since our birth.
- Our retirement years are a time of consolidation rather than expansion. Slow the pace and narrow the focus.
- Our retirement years are a time of coalescence, drawing the parts together to a whole.
- Most people know what the idea of sabbath is, but very few people practice sabbath to any serious extent. In our retirement years we should give serious consideration to Sabbath practices in our lives.

To be a risk-taker demands that you remember God is still in charge of the universe--and your life as well. The Bible is filled with examples of risk-takers who took a chance on living on the growing edge, like Joseph and Job who trusted God at their lowest point in life, and their lives were filled with excitement, miracles, and adventure as a result.

– Jim Smoke

We cannot live in the afternoon of life according to the program of life's morning, for what was great in the morning will be little at evening and what in the morning was true, will at evening become a lie.

– Carl Jung

4. Transitions

God has all of us in transition. Transitions can be positive or negative. Transitions can mean many things.

Transitions can be things like:

- The end of a role
- The end of parenting
- The end of good health
- The end of a dream
- The end of a relationship

Three words that can characterize times of transition:

- A. **Rebellion.** If we are rebellious during transitions that will lead us at times to making rash decisions. “I don’t care what God wants, I am going to do it.”
- B. **Resignation.** (The most dangerous of all.) Resignation leads us to thinking “That is just the way it is.” Resignation leads to despair. Resignation also leads to presumption. Presumption about how our lives are to go. Presumption that we know what is best for us, we know better than God. It is the assumption that I know best what is good for me. Resignation leaves us without hope. “It will be what it will be.”
- C. **Redemptive.** Living in the reality of what God has allowed to come into my life. Like Moses’ mother trusting Moses to the basket. Ruth trusting God by following her mother-in-law. Trust is redemptive.

It is Moses standing on the mountain and being told by God that you can't go into the Promised Land. It is redemptive as we trust in the mercy of God.

In times of transition we can allow them to be redemptive by focusing on God's mercy and not on our faith. We look to Him and not to ourselves or others.

Romans 5:5 And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

For example, our hope for our children at tough times in their lives (or in our life) is not found in our hope that our children will do what is right. Our hope is not in our ability to make it work out. No, our hope must be in God and the mercy of God. I don't trust my children to do the right thing; I trust God, by his mercy, to care for and work through my children.

Transition times quite often challenge our faith. Based on Hebrews 11:6 (see below), we need to keep asking the following questions during our times of transition.

- Will I continue to come to Him in this transition or hard time?
- Do I really think God is good and has my best interest in mind?
- Will I really trust Him?
- Do I believe He is with me through this transition?
- Do I believe He is in control?

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV) And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Some Guidelines for Successfully Living Through Our Retirement Transitions

(thoughts for successful transitioning into our later years) ...

- Slow your pace...
- Narrow your focus...
- Focus on the things that strike passion and desire in your heart...
- Focus on people more than programs...
- Measure life in terms of people...
- Invest your life by investing in people...
- Give the whole Gospel and not just the salvation piece of the Gospel...
- Be aware of the importance of community at this time in your life. Commit to community...
- Be aware of the importance of partnering with your spouse at this time in life. Commit to things that you both think are important and that you can do together.
- Develop your own life mission statement and then create a combined life mission statement.
- Write out a life ministry statement
 - i. What action?
 - ii. Who is the benefactor of this ministry?
 - iii. What is the result of this ministry?
 - iv. What commitment are you making to this ministry?

Some thoughts from Scripture about our transition into retirement...

Numbers 8:24-26 (NIV) This applies to the Levites: Men twenty-five years old or more shall come to take part in the work at the Tent of Meeting, ²⁵ but at the age of fifty, they must retire from their regular service and work no longer.

²⁶ They may assist their brothers in performing their duties at the Tent of Meeting, but they themselves must not do the work. This, then, is how you are to assign the responsibilities of the Levites.

The reference closest to retirement mentioned in the Bible is found in Numbers 8:24-26. This passage indicates that these Levites, though instructed to retire from their regular service, did not retire from serving the Lord. At the age of fifty, they exchanged their work-related activities from serving laboriously to one of advising and assisting a younger generation. A life lesson drawn from their situation suggests that one should not ask whether one should retire or continue working, but rather 'How can my life best give glory to God as I age?'

– Gerald K. Chan; *Serving in the Golden Years: The Tribe of Caleb*.

Psalm 71:18 (NIV) Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.

Psalm 92:14-15 (NIV) They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green,¹⁵ proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

The theme of lifelong serving means serving God throughout a person's life, from the time he/she becomes a Christian to the end of his/her life regardless of age. Lifelong serving appears to stand in contrast to retirement from serving. To many people, the idealized image of retirement is to do what you feel like doing when you want to do it. Being stress-free and enjoying leisure time are key elements because retirement is considered to be a just reward for a lifetime of hard work. There is no shortage of suggestions on how to retire in the literature: financial planning, vacation planning, travelling, starting a new hobby, or even sitting on the porch, sleeping, and doing nothing.

The Bible's teaching is against idle living. According to Ps. 71, seniors should continue to witness for God to the younger generation: "Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come (Ps. 71:18). They can be productive: "They shall bring forth fruit in old age ..." (Ps. 92:14), and are also full of wisdom: "I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom" (Job 32:7). Elderly men and women have a responsibility to guide and teach the younger generation how to live by setting an example (Titus 2:1-5). These so-called "aged saints," having spent a lifetime walking closely with God, are able to relate and testify to the truths of God's Word working in their lives. The Apostle Paul said in his letter to the Ephesians that we have to redeem the time that has been given to us: "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15-16) and this means that we must take hold of every opportunity we have to serve the Lord. Indeed, the third quarter of life, often marked by retirement from necessary employment, opens the door to focusing one's efforts towards serving God and humanity in new endeavors, enlarging one's horizons and fulfilling dreams not previously realized.

– Gerald K. Chan: *Serving in the Golden Years: The Tribe of Caleb*.

Joshua 1:6-11 (NIV) "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. ⁷ Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." ¹⁰ So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: ¹¹ "Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.'"

The book of Joshua is recommended reading whenever we find ourselves in transition. After 40 years of wandering and setbacks, God's people were poised to enter the Promised Land. Moses, their great leader, had died, and Joshua, his assistant, was in charge. God told Joshua to "be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go" (Josh. 1:7). God's words of direction were to be the bedrock of Joshua's leadership in every situation.

The Lord's charge and promise to Joshua apply to us as well: "Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (v. 9). He is with us in every transition.

– Walk Thru the Bible Blog (June 22, 2015)

5. Change

Isaiah 43:19 See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.

- Change is the new "normal."
- We must accept change as a constant. Things won't stay the same; don't fight it.
- Many men head into their later years, wanting and fighting to have things stay just like they are.
- We serve the God of the "new thing." Isaiah 43:19; Isaiah 48:6.
- We find great security in predictability, but it is mostly an illusion.
- We can't make others change; the door to change opens from the inside, from our side of the door.
- The Holy Spirit and the Bible are our greatest change agents.

6. Life as a Journey

Psalms 84:5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.

Eccles. 3:1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven...

- Life is a journey, a pilgrimage.
- There is to be joy in the journey. It might not be fun, but it can be joyful.
- We need to be content where we are. The "good old days" were not that good.
- We need to focus on the issues that are appropriate for our current stage of the journey.
- If we are not careful we will focus on the destination and miss the fun and wonder of the trip/journey. The journey is just as important as getting there.
- Young men are defined by their warrior strength, old men by their wisdom.
- All journeys are expressions of faith.
- Heaven is the end of the journey for Believers. Rev 21

I live as: a pilgrim, not in control; a steward, not an owner; a soldier, not with security.

– Bob Buford

At some point in every man's life he must face the reality that the journey is more than a trip. It is a pilgrimage, a pilgrimage that ends with our Maker. For we travel to a city whose founder and maker is God.

– Robert Hicks

7. Marriage

Genesis 2:24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

- Our marriages must be a top priority for us if we are to succeed in having a happy, successful marriage for all of life.
- Fidelity in marriage is the biblical norm and it is an absolute.
- Our marriage is a union, not a relationship; we are one not two, together not separate.
- When the kids come along, the roles of being husband and wife often take second place to the roles of being mom and dad. We must now go back to the priority of being husband and wife, our primary roles are no longer mom and dad.
- Studies of midlife show that in women the need for achievement often increases, while in men it often decreases.
- Midlife can send men and women in different directions. While a man in midlife crisis may seek a new relationship, often a woman at midlife is seeking a new role, switching or exchanging her role as full-time wife and mother.

Men easily approach marriage and all relationships like a car, and when it is not working, men look for some way to fix it. A relationship is not something that can be fixed by doing something. It takes time and attention and relating.

– Larry Crabb

8. Community & Friendship

Proverbs 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

Friendships and relationships will have a much higher priority in “second-half living”.

- Reciprocal living (the "one another" commands) is the biblical norm. We are to work hard at living in community.
- Relationships are hard to maintain, and most men move away from deep relationships, retreating quickly to their areas of competence and predictability.
- Most men are lonely and have very few close, deep friendships. Our retirement years are a time to give yourselves more to deeper and more vulnerable relationships.
- Men opt for shallow rather than deep relationships; shallow relationships are just plain easier.
- Research has shown that the number one need in the minds and hearts of people is loneliness.
- We need each other. We must move away from the temptation of cocooning.
- We all are limited, handicapped people in need of community. The Christian life is to be lived in community.

Our western emphasis on individualism has personalized the gospel to the extreme. We see its message purely in terms of individual benefits. When we receive Christ as our 'personal' Savior, God creates a personalized, tailor-made plan for our life. Scripture does not support the notion that we are personally at the center of God's plan of redeeming men and women. Only Christ can be there...We are not free agents with a personalized plan...There is a higher agenda than my own personal benefit or even my own well-being. When we understand our role in spreading the gospel as one of reconciling sinful men and women to the holy God, we see the weight of our responsibility. Instead of seeing ourselves as foremost (as in an individualized gospel), we are to be the least of all. We might even be expendable--martyrs for the gospel's sake.

– Glen Kehrein

9. Wisdom and Discernment

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

- Completing an assessment of where we are going and what we are to focus on in later life is very important. We must stop and listen, waiting on God to give us His directions for our later years.
- The midlife years need not, should not be crisis years.
- It is wrong to assume that we should move to some other place/career, and it is equally wrong to assume that we should stay where we are. We must complete a review to know and hear the voice of God on the issue.
- Our later years should not be a noisy time or place. We need to slow the pace and narrow the focus of our lives and ministries.
- There is a great need for solitude and reflection at these later stages of life.
- If we are not careful, inertia will carry us through midlife. I went to the office yesterday and today, so I probably will go to the office tomorrow, not because I feel called to it, but because I don't know what else to do. "Because we have always done it this way" is a poor reason to keep doing it that way.
- We must make decisions about life which flow from our understanding of who God is and what he is shaping us for.
- Purpose is not a self-seeking choice but a seeking of what a sovereign God is doing. The key issue is His purpose for me and not what I want my purpose to be.
- In our later years we should be asking questions of evaluation: how am I doing? What should I be committed to? Where do I best fit in advancing the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus.
- God is "The God of the Second Chance." "It ain't over till it's over."
- If you are an "average" American, you will live to be about 80.

Wisdom:

Wisdom in the Bible originally meant technical expertise or the ability to do a job well. It was skillfulness in dealing with whatever was at hand. And, since the matter at hand was always life itself, wisdom came to mean 'skill at life,' or 'the capacity to live life as it ought to be lived.'

– David Roper, Growing Slowly Wise, p. 91.

The wise are those who live well, and who, when finished, have something to show for it. They have accomplished something eternally worthwhile.

However, it's not what we know that makes us wise, but what we are. James makes that very clear: 'Let the wise man show his wisdom by his good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom.' Wisdom is the 'good life,' or more precisely, the 'beautiful life—a holy, genial presence that makes visible the life of our invisible Lord.'

Wisdom is the essence of the spiritual life and the means by which everything is done. It is the dynamic that draws others to God, if they are to be drawn at all. It is the most powerful force on earth. Remember Peter's words: 'Live such good (beautiful) lives among the pagans that...they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us' (1 Pet 2:12). This is wisdom.

It is far better to be wise than well-informed because, as James warns us, knowledge alone is counterproductive. It gets past our hearts and goes to our heads. It riddles our thoughts with 'bitter envy and selfish ambition,' and where these motivations and agendas exist, James assures us, 'there is disorder and every evil practice.' Without wisdom, no matter how well-informed and well-intentioned we may be, we will soon find ourselves doing the work of the devil."

– David Roper, Growing Slowly Wise, p. 92.

Discernment:

Every Christian should be able to answer two questions. First, what do you think Jesus is saying to you at this point in your life, in the context of the challenges and opportunities you are facing? Second (and just as critical), what indicators give you some measure of confidence that it is indeed Jesus speaking to you rather than someone or something else? This book addresses these questions through an examination of the inner witness of the Spirit, with the conviction that the Spirit is present to each person and that each of us has the capacity to respond intentionally to this witness.

– Gorton T. Smith, The Voice of Jesus, p. 9.

Discernment opens us up to listen to and recognize the voice and patterns of God's direction in our lives.

– Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, Spiritual Disciplines Handbook, p. 99.

This is life: an intentional response to the voice of Jesus, a voice that comes through the presence of the Spirit. Discernment is the discipline of attending to this presence and responding to this leading.

– Gorton T. Smith, The Voice of Jesus, p. 18.

The word discernment implies (at least in English) three different concepts simultaneously. First, it includes the idea of insight, which speaks of the capacity to see something clearly—the acumen to recognize that which is. Second, discernment includes the idea of discretion, the capacity to distinguish between good and evil as well as between good and the better. A wine taster, for example, has the particular capacity to distinguish between good wine and even better wine. And third, discernment includes the idea of judgment. To be a discerning person is to be a wise woman or man capable of making a good assessment, a judgment that is informed by knowledge and understanding. Through the regular practice of discernment, a person grows in wisdom—a wisdom evident in the quality of one's choices.

– Gorton T. Smith, The Voice of Jesus, pp. 9-10.

We truly understand when we know something with heart and mind. Discernment, then, is not merely a matter of rational analysis, of weighing the pros and cons and seeking to respond with a biblically informed mind to the options we are facing. Neither is discernment a matter of pure revelation, what some call a 'word from the Lord.' Rather, it is a way of knowing and seeing that is experienced as a profound interplay of intellect and emotion in which head and heart are informing and guiding each other. Discernment is a matter of attending to both the circumstances of our lives and the emotional contours of our hearts.

– Gorton T. Smith, The Voice of Jesus, p. 53.

Christian discernment is the spiritual discipline by which we listen to God by attending with heart and mind to the presence of the Spirit in our lives.

– Gorton T. Smith, The Voice of Jesus, p. 56.

10. Success

What is your definition of success at this later stage in life?

Eccles. 12:13-14 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

- In our later years many of us move from an interest in success to an interest in significance.
- Success and significance are not necessarily the same.
- What legacy of significance are you leaving your children and grandchildren?
- A definition of success: being able to say with conviction that we did what God wanted us to do.
- Being (what we are in our being) is always more important than doing. It is foundational.
- Success will always be determined by both being and doing.
- We are not what we do, we are not what we own, we are not what we drive. We are children of the King.
- Our "ultimate contribution" is the legacy that we leave behind after life is over.
- It is possible to live a life without regrets, it is not possible to live without some failure and pain.

Francis Schaeffer well described what he called two "impoverished values" of Western culture: (1) personal peace and (2) affluence.

To laugh and love much; To win the respect of intelligent persons and the affection of children; To earn the approval of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; To appreciate beauty; To find the best in others; To give of one's self without the slightest thought of return; To have accomplished a task, whether by a healthy child, a rescued soul, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; To have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exaltation; To know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived; This is to have succeeded.

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

11. Our Spiritual Life

Psalms 27:4 One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.

Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- Our spiritual life is foundational to everything else we do.
- Spiritual growth must be a lifetime pursuit. Spiritual growth is a worth lifetime pursuit.
- We may need a renewed commitment to the value and authority of Scripture in our later years.
- Spiritual depth, spiritual maturity, is the Biblical norm and is available to all believers.
- We must always focus on the joy of knowing Jesus and being known by Him, rather than on doing good things for Him. It is about grace, not works.
- The joy of and need for grace -- Christ's empowerment each day.
- We must enjoy a lifetime of learning.
- The sin of self-sufficiency can easily sneak into our lives.

- To be effective leaders and to finish well we must maintain a vibrant relationship with God right to the end.
- Our relationship with Christ is a well without a bottom. We can and we must go deeper as we go on in life.
- We must maintain an eternal prospective. Our citizenship is in heaven. Phil 3:20.
- We must remember our own need for the gospel message. Christ died for me.
- There are no "spiritual blowouts," only "spiritual slow leaks."
- Worship must be a priority for us, coming into His presence and seeing His greatness.
- There is a difference between my personal devotional life and the ministries I may have.
- We must seek accountability. We all need someone to ask us the hard questions.
- It is important to remember our spiritual milestones. Ebenezer.
- Our prayer life is a good barometer of our spiritual health.
- Prayer is important, "For apart from me you can do nothing." Jn 15:5.
- Our personal devotional life is the foundation for any ministry that God may give us.
- We must not confuse spiritual depth with ministry, they may or may not be the same.
- In the second half of life we must have a "renewed passion," or we will choose to live without passion (passionless), or we will choose an "alternate passion" (run off with the blond).
- Our first half passion for Christ will not carry us through our second half, we need a renewed second half passion for Christ.
- Spiritual plateauing is "leveling off" spiritually, we cease to grow spiritually, our heads hold truth but our hearts are growing cold. It is not the same as "backsliding" or moral failure, we stall and shallow out, and don't finish the race. Rev 2:1-5

12. Calling

- All believers are called, not just the "full time" people.
- We can expect a new or renewed call during our later years in life. We are to ask God for direction and create time and space in our lives so we can listen to Jesus' voice speaking to us.
- We must seek God for our second half call.
- It is important for us to be a "called person" and not a "driven person."
- Calling has more to do with being than doing.
- God's will is not a dot, it is much larger than that, more like a large circle.
- As we go on to different things we must go forward with a sense of "call" and not with a sense of fleeing or running away from the current situation.

13. Our Children and Grandchildren

1 Samuel 1:27-28 I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. ²⁸So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord." And he worshiped the Lord there.

- As parents we are gardeners, not sculptors. The gardener has an important part to play but is not solely responsible for the end result; the sculptor is.
- We must be careful of our expectations for our children. God has a plan for each of our children and grandchildren and what we want for them is for God to enact His plan for them, not to somehow believe that our plans and dreams for our children and grandchildren is what should be worked out.
- We must not live our lives through our children.
- We have our lives; our children must have theirs.

Our lives need to be attractive to our children in the ways that matter most. These ways do not involve our possessions or our professions as much as they do our allegiances. If we have ultimate allegiance to Christ, we will be far from perfect, but we will have integrity before him. The goal of the Christian parent is not to so "protect" a child that they don't know any other way of life. Nor is it to intimidate the child to follow Christ. The goal is that our children should say "I really want to follow in those footsteps."

– Dick Keyes, *True Heroism*; p. 225

The gardener is the right model. The sculptor starts with a shapeless piece and with skill and creativity shapes a form. The success or failure of the final product has to do only with the skill and patience of the sculptor. By contrast, the gardener starts with seed that has a life of its own. The gardener must prepare the soil, provide nutrients, water and sunlight. A fruitful harvest will be in part due to the gardener's efforts, but

also due to the original seed and many aspects outside the gardener's control. The gardener is an observer to something that God is doing in a way that the sculptor is not. Children are not the products of their parent's proficiency, but are first of all images of God, entrusted into the parent's care.

– Dick Keyes, *True Heroism*; p. 246

14. Ministry

Isaiah 43:4 Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life.

Isaiah 50:4 The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.

- The opportunity for mentoring is one of the great privileges of our back nine lives.
- Ministry is an easy place to hide spiritually. People will assume that we are walking intimately with Christ because of our ministry position. We must be accountable for our own spiritual life and development.
- We must make and maintain a priority of active ministry among the lost.
- We need to get outside of the "holy huddle."
- Sometimes we should choose to serve others where we do not take leadership roles.
- We must maintain a priority of service. How is your servant heart?
- A good ministry philosophy: 2+2+1. At any one time I am praying for and witnessing to two others to come to faith, helping two to grow in their faith, and teaching one how to minister to others.

Final Thoughts

Psalms 1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. ²But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. ⁴Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. ⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. ⁶For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Isaiah 35:8-10 And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. ⁹No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, ¹⁰and the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Folder: Finishing Well / File: Summary of the Back Nine Living Class