

Lessons from a Father

by Bayless Conley

Copyright © Answers with Bayless Conley

Today, I want to take a moment and pray before we get into the Word. If you have a Bible, you can open to 1 Timothy. We're going to spend the whole morning there. We won't go to any other books. I don't think. When it comes to salvation or illumination from God's Word, you can't just make it happen. When Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do men say that I am? Some say this. Some say that." He said, "Who do you say?" Peter said, "You're the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said, "Flesh and blood haven't revealed this to you, Peter, but My Father in heaven." It takes a revelation from God to get saved. God reveals Jesus to your heart. As much as I would like to try and do that, I can't. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. When it comes to the truth of God's Word, literally, a revelation from the Holy Spirit can change your whole life. I still remember. I was a young Christian, and to this day—It's been, I don't know, 47 years, something like that, I've been walking with Jesus.

As a young Christian, I went to what they call a little Grange Hall, a feed store, a little meeting place for cowboys and country folks. An evangelist was preaching that night, and he preached a message from Mark 4 on the Parable of the Sower. It absolutely changed my life. It is the single most significant message that I ever heard preached in my life. I understood the importance of God's Word that day, and it's been an ever-growing revelation since. I still remember walking out of that meeting being changed, and I'm still changed to this day. One interaction with God's Word, one eye-opening moment with the Holy Spirit, can change everything for you. Will you pray with me that we would just yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit and get ready for something good to happen? Can we do that? Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we come to You in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. We thank You that we have instant and complete access to You at all times because we're family. You said we can come boldly to the throne of grace, obtain mercy, and find grace to help in our time of need. Father, we come right now. We ask You for a spirit of wisdom and illumination as we look at Your Word together. Open the eyes of our hearts. Cause our inward eyes to see and our inward ears to hear. Lord, we ask this with a view to being doers of Your Word and not just hearers. We want to be participants. Holy Spirit, we recognize Your holy presence here. We thank You for Your work among us and in us. In Jesus' name, amen.

First Timothy 1:2 NKJV says,

² To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul is writing to Timothy as a son, my true son in the faith. Though I'm sure he had many sons, there's only three men in the Scripture that have that designation. There's only three men that Paul ever referred to specifically as his sons: one was Timothy, another was Titus, and the other was Onesimus. It's a worthwhile study to look at the lives of these three men. What I would like to do is take a look at some things. In fact, seven things in all that Paul passed on to Timothy as a father to his son. We don't know that Paul was ever a physical father, but he certainly was a

Lessons from a Father

spiritual father. These seven things are things that every father should try to transmit to their sons and daughters. It's going to be pretty practical today.

Seven things that this father was transmitting and downloading into the life of his son. And as fathers, they're things that every one of us should try and download into our kids. The number one thing—That's either by verbal instruction or just by modeling it. The first thing, and Paul modeled this for Timothy, was that you need to find and fulfill your role in life as a father. Find and fulfill your role in life. One of the greatest gifts that we can give our children is to live our lives by design. Everyone says, "by design." Listen to these verses. It's actually 1 Timothy 1:1 NKJV. It says,

¹ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope...

First Timothy 2:7 NKJV, he writes,

⁷ For which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Now, Paul said, "Look, I'm an apostle appointed by God. This is my lane. This is how God has designed me. This is what He's called me to do. I'm an apostle. I'm a preacher. I'm a teacher." He knew what he was called to do. He was living by design. Penguins are designed for cold climates and icy waters. Eagles are designed to soar and to live in the heights. The ostrich is designed for arid climates and is suited to dwell on the ground. They're all birds, but they're all crafted by God differently.

In the same way, we each have a unique design. Some are called to preach, teach, and lead. Some are called to design, to organize, to build, and to create, on and on. Just different things that we are made by God to do. Every one of you has a design from God. Some of you may remember the movie. I think it came out in—Oh, gosh, I'm not even sure—Early 2000, 2003, 2004. It's called Miracle. It was about the 1980 US Olympic hockey team. Then, we had no professional athletes, ever, that performed in the Olympics, for our country at least.

There were just collegians. Here they are, in Lake Placid, and they defeated the powerful Russian hockey team. They called it "the miracle." They went on and got the gold medal from Finland, just amazing. In that movie, they actually recreate a very famous scene. A little talk the coach of the US Olympic team gave to all of those hockey players before they went out to face the Soviet team. He said, "Every one of you was born to be a hockey player, and you were meant to be here at this moment." It's good to know what you were born for.

I was talking to a friend the other day, actually, going back and forth via text. He lives in another country, and he's a bit of an entrepreneur. He has done a lot of successful things, business-wise. He's very generous and supports the gospel in his nation in some significant ways. He has this new project that he's working on, and we were going back and forth about it. I told him what I thought of it. It's just really significant, and I think it's going to have a great impact for the kingdom. He just sent me back five words. He texted me back and said, "I was born for this." He's living his life by design. When you're flowing in that role, the thing that God has designed you for, your life becomes a sermon. Out of that center, you can preach powerfully and speak powerfully into the lives of your children. When a child observes a father, who is excited about his work and is fulfilled in doing it, that is a great inspiration.

Lessons from a Father

When a father is lackluster, bored, and unfulfilled with his life's work, it does not set the right example for a son or daughter. Rather than having a son or daughter say, "My greatest fear is that I'm going to become my father," they should be saying, "I want to be like my dad. He loves his work. His life is filled with color, adventure, and challenge. He may not be known on earth, but I'll tell you what, men like that are known in heaven. I want to be like my dad. I want to look at life like he looks at life. He comes in, and he's happy about his work. He's happy about supporting his family. He's happy about what he does, whether he is working with his hands or working at a computer, or whatever it might be." That's the kind of example that we want to set for our kids.

Here's just a final thought on this point. Sometimes, perhaps many times, even before they're saved, people tap into their purpose and their design. We are made in the image of God. Friend, you're a spirit being. You have a soul. You live in a physical body. I think even before salvation, people just intuitively, not always, certainly not always, but many times people will tap into what God's designed them to be. I was thinking about it one day. The Apostle Paul, before he came to Christ, was a religious scholar and a teacher of the Scriptures. Why wasn't he a politician? Why wasn't he a businessman? I think it was a spiritual DNA thing. I think for many people, it's the same thing. Whether it's acting, teaching, building, creating, working with their hands, or leading others, they have just tapped into the thing that God's created them to do.

I think back on my life. Even when I was a kid, whatever I was doing with other kids, I always took the lead. If we were building a fort, I took over. Some say that would be bossy. I think it was a spiritual DNA thing, working out. If we were taking a hike through the woods, I took the lead. If we were playing a game, somehow, I just took the lead. It was just a natural thing for me to do, and looking back, I think it was a God thing. Just God's DNA working its way out. The second thing from fathers that we learned from the Apostle Paul is that fathers should model humility. First Timothy 1:12-15 NKJV, he said,

¹² And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, ¹³ although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. ¹⁴ And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

Paul knew what he was gifted to do, but he also was very, very aware that every good thing in his life was a product of God's grace. It wasn't just him pulling himself up by his bootstraps. When it came to salvation and his success, he realized they were not things merely created through his own human willpower and effort. They were the result of God's grace in responding to that grace. As fathers, we need to model humility in salvation and in any success that we achieve. We used to periodically do business breakfasts for businessmen and businesswomen. And we would get a successful businessperson in the church to share with them.

I remember one, in particular, we had a few years ago. It was a guy in church. He's a friend of mine, and he owns a number of very successful restaurants. In fact, if you live in the area, you've probably eaten in one. He shared some sage advice. Just some really good practical stuff for people engaged in business, but I was most impressed by his humility. He was very, very quick to not somehow say, "Look what I've done." But he gave credit to all the people that helped him arrive to the place that he had gotten to. Most of all, he gave thanks to God. He said, "This is just the grace of God. It's a gift of God." He shared practical things, but he also showed gratitude for people. Realizing that he didn't do it by himself.

Lessons from a Father

Alex Haley, the author of *Roots*, in his office, he had an interesting picture. It was a turtle sitting up on a fence post. And the lesson was that the turtle obviously didn't get up on the fence post by itself. He said, "Any time I start thinking, 'Wow, look what I've done. Look what I've achieved. My book has been made into a miniseries that millions of people have watched, et cetera.'" He said, "Whenever I start thinking that way, I always look at the picture. And I remember, 'Hey, that turtle didn't get up there by himself, and this turtle didn't get up on the fence post by himself.'" Friend, that turtle, the one sitting by you, didn't get up on the fence post by himself or by herself. It's important to model humility. Let's move on to the third thing. Good fathers encourage their children to move toward their gifting. Encourage your kids to move toward their gifting. I want to read a couple of verses to you. First Timothy 1:18 NKJV, first of all, he says,

¹⁸ This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare.

He refers to this again in 1 Timothy 4:14-15 NKJV. Listen to it,

¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. ¹⁵ Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.

Do not neglect the gift that's in you, Timothy. Now, the gift Paul's referring to, obviously, was supernatural, but God has put gifts in every person. Every person is naturally gifted in some ways, and I believe, again, that has to do with our spiritual DNA. I'm so thankful that my dad, who's been in heaven for a number of years now, never tried to squeeze me into his mold. He always encouraged me and made room for me to find my own way and where I fit. He never tried to press me. My dad was a dentist. He never tried to press me into dentistry. I would've been a lousy dentist. My dad was beyond fanatic when it came to football. He had a full scholarship offered to him by Bear Bryant when Bear Bryant was coaching at Kentucky.

Some of your college football people will know the significance of that. I still have the letter Bear Bryant wrote to my dad. My dad was a football star in the state of West Virginia. He was known across the country. When it came to his passion for football, he was a raging inferno, but he never pushed me, and I never played. There were other sports that I liked more, and he just encouraged me in those. I'm so thankful for the wisdom that my father showed in that. Like I said, he gave me room.

Our own kids—Most of you know our oldest son, Harrison, obviously. He's the lead pastor here at Cottonwood. We have two other kids. Did you know that? We have twins Rebecca and Spencer, and we're just as proud of them as we are of Harrison. Rebecca is a kid whisperer, always has been. She has this amazing gift with children. She's a schoolteacher. She's a fourth-grade teacher. Our son Spencer is a musician, an amazing musician, and sound engineer. In fact, this morning, he's doing sound at another church, but he works at a major studio in LA. He's an amazing sound engineer.

We just encourage them, "Find out your gifts. And whatever you do, we just want you to do it with all of your heart. And ultimately, do it for the glory of God." If none of the kids would've ended up being preachers, I'm okay with that. God's the one who does the calling. I think about some of my friends. One of them, in particular, was a very close friend of mine growing up. His father basically threatened him and browbeat him into going into the family business. He didn't want to, but he did it. He threatened, "I'm going to cut you off, et cetera, et cetera, if you do this."

Lessons from a Father

He just didn't know how to break away from that. He didn't feel like it was what he wanted to do. If you measured it strictly monetarily, he's had a very successful career, but he's been unhappy every day for decades, decades, and decades. Unhappy every single day. He was the proverbial square peg that was pounded into a round hole.

I have another friend. His family, for generations, owned a sawmill, a very lucrative timber business. His dad and everyone expected him to take over. And hey, instant inherited wealth. You've got this great business. But he said, "You know what? I know you want me to do this. I know you're expecting me to do this, but I don't want to run a sawmill." He said, "I feel like I'm designed to be an interior designer. That's what I want to do. That's where my passion is." And so, he took the courage, and he did it. He's been a really successful interior designer. No, he has not had the wealth he would've had he been the lead guy and the owner of the sawmill. But he's been fulfilled every day, and honestly, I think he's had far greater influence and been able to touch many, many more people through pursuing his gifting. I just want to encourage you fathers that are in here. Find out what your kids' gifts are and encourage them in that. In Proverbs 22:6 NKJV, we all know the verse.

⁶ Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

Listen to it from the amplified classic version. It actually brings out the Hebrew. Proverbs 22:6 AMPC says,

⁶ Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent], and when he is old he will not depart from it.

Train him up or train her up in the way they should go, according to their individual gifting or bent. Your kids, my kids, every one of us have an inward bent, an inward gifting. It points us in the direction of God's will, God's plan for our lives, and where we will be most effective with our lives. All right, let's move on to the fourth thing. Good fathers warn their children about dangers. They warn them about dangers. It's a part of getting them ready for life. I'm going to read a number of verses, but think about this as Paul writes to his son, Timothy. In 1 Timothy 4:1-2 NKJV, he says,

¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron...

Now, think about it. He said, "Look, Timothy, there's going to be people, and they'll be influenced by demons. Their conscience will be seared. They'll do you dirty, and they won't think twice about it. They speak lies, and they're hypocrites." He said in 1 Timothy 6:3-5 NKJV,

³ If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, ⁴ he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, ⁵ useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

Lessons from a Father

Now, think about the kind of people he's talking about. He says, "Look, you're going to experience, and you're going to run into people like this. You are going to run into people who are proud and who are obsessed with disputes. They just want to fight. They'll be envious. They'll create strife. They're destitute of the truth. Their minds are corrupted. Timothy, get ready. This is part of the landscape that you're about to walk into." He goes on in 1 Timothy 6:9-11 NKJV,

⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. ¹¹ But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

Timothy, there's some greedy people out there, as well. There are charlatans and crooks in the world. And in the church, you will find apostates and pretenders. You can't fall out of the saddle when you encounter them. They are just part of the landscape. It's just true. It was true then. It's true today. A good father prepares his children for these things. Those who would shield and shelter their kids from the knowledge that life has its unsavory characters, its betrayals, and its disappointments are not doing their kids any favors. You need to warn them. It's a wicked world out there, and some of that wickedness creeps into the church sometimes. It's what Paul's talking to Timothy about. Timothy, you're going to find this stuff in the church.

We need to prepare them and make them ready. I remember one day, I had some sink problems and had a plumber come over to the house. I met him and introduced myself. He's under the sink working, and he's kind of a captive audience, so I'm going to share with him. I always think that way. I started talking about this and that. And I brought church into it. I started talking about the Lord. He comes out from under the sink and says, "Look." He says, "I'm a Christian." I said, "Really?" I said, "That's awesome." He said, "I don't go to church, though. It's full of a bunch of hypocrites." It was just this bitterness spewed out of him. He talked about some stuff that had happened to him in church, and somehow, he just was not prepared to deal with that reality, and so he had quit on God. He quit on church and quit on the house of God. He just wasn't prepared for that reality.

Listen, the counterfeit does not cancel the genuine. It confirms it. They don't counterfeit \$3 bills. They don't counterfeit \$11 bills. They don't counterfeit \$131 bills. Why? Because there's no real ones. They counterfeit \$100 bills, fifties, twenties, and tens, and there's a whole lot more real bills out there than there are counterfeit bills. The counterfeit confirms the reality of the true, and it's true with people as well. You just have to be ready.

I was thinking this morning about a guy. He started coming to church and asked to meet with me. I said, "Yes." The church has been going, at this time, for maybe two years. It was still relatively small, and we were on a pretty tight budget. He shared this story with me. He was a painter, and he had this job coming up. He had some bills, and he didn't have the money to get the supplies. He said, "I've got the job. I'll have the job finished in two days, but I don't have the money for it." He asked me personally if I could help him, sitting in my office.

It just happened that I had just come from the bank and I had withdrawn some money. We were going to go on a family vacation. I think we were going out to Palm Springs in mid-August. Yes. For people that are watching somewhere else, that means it's going to be 115 degrees Fahrenheit outside, so you can get hotels really, really cheap. I found this dirt-cheap hotel, but it

Lessons from a Father

was what we could afford. I think, “Okay, we’ll take the kids to the water park, and we’ll go walk around the museum. It’s free.” I took out the money for the family to go to the waterpark and for us to eat, everything we’re going to eat. And I’ve got this little hotel for like six days, for almost nothing, but it was a lot of money. I said, “Well, look.”

I said, “I just took some money out of the bank.” I said, “When are you going to have this job done?” He said, “Two days.” I said, “All right. Well, I’m leaving with my family on vacation. This is my vacation money.” I said, “This is the only thing we have to eat with, and I’m taking the kids to the waterpark.” I said, “I’ll loan it to you. You’ll get the job done in two days, and you just pay me back.” He says, “Great.” He says, “There’ll be an excess.” It was the last time I ever saw him. I put that money in his hand and never saw him again. He never came back to church again, and we had an interesting vacation. What do you do? Do you get bitter and say, “I’m never going to trust anyone again?” Of course not. You forgive, and you form some boundaries and some guidelines for the future. It was a learning experience, but you’re going to run into people like that. It’s a part of life. Some of you are looking at me like you just left one of those people.

All right, let’s move on. Number five: fathers teach them how to properly interact with the opposite sex and to show respect for their elders. A good father’s going to teach his kids how to properly interact with the opposite sex and to show respect for their elders. I think about being unsaved. Being with some of my friends and around their dads, they did just the opposite. Their dads encouraged us to be whoremongers, and encouraged us to be immoral. I was in some pretty bad environments as a young teenager, growing up, especially because of some of my friends’ fathers and the way that they encouraged us. But a good father’s going to teach you the right way to interact. First Timothy 5:1-2 NKJV, says,

- ¹ Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers,
- ² older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.

Everyone say, “with all purity.” It’s very easy for a young person’s affections to get tangled up with and attached to the wrong person if there are no guidelines. Dads, it’s our job. If there’s no guidelines, it’s all too easy to get into a morally compromising position with someone that you’re attracted to. Some years back, I was asked to go over to the youth and talk to the teenagers about girl-boy relationships and to give them some guidelines. I’m thinking about it, “Okay, that’s not my wheelhouse, talking to teenagers, first of all.” They’re the hardest crowd of all.

But I said yes. The subject matter, I thought, “Man, this is going to be awkward.” I thought, “It’s got to be really simple and maybe funny.” I don’t know. I went over, and I told them three things. I said, “You guys going to be okay if you do three things. Number one, don’t get horizontal. If you’re there with your girlfriend or a friend, you’re watching TV, and her mom and dad aren’t there, you stay in a seated position. Don’t get horizontal. Whatever happens, don’t get horizontal. Do not, do not, do not lay down on the couch. That was number one. Whatever happens, don’t get horizontal.

Number two: don’t touch what you don’t have. Any part that’s on their body that’s not on your body is off limits. You do not touch it.” I said, “Number three: don’t put any part of your body into any part of their body.” That was my sermon. Paul told Timothy, “Treat them like brothers and sisters.” Develop a friendship first. If it grows into something more, great. If it doesn’t, no harm, no foul. There needs to be guidelines. Dads, it’s your job. You get to do that. The other part of this one, it’s all in that same verse. God loves it when we show respect to the older generation. In the book of Leviticus, this is God’s command. Leviticus 19:32 NKJV says,

Lessons from a Father

³² “You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man.”

My dad modeled that for me my whole life. I think if any of you were raised in the South, you know that is very much a part of Southern culture. You say, “Yes sir, no sir, yes ma’am, no ma’am.” To this day, if all my cousins were sitting in a room and one of you ladies walked in the room, every one of them would stand to their feet, and not a single one of them would sit down until you had a seat. That was the way they were raised, and all my cousins are from the South.

My dad did that his whole life. I still remember him saying it. I used to think it was funny. We’d see some guy working on his car, and the guy’s obviously older. My dad would say, “Yes sir, no sir,” to this guy. I said, “Dad, what are you doing?” It’s something that I’ve done. I still remember my daughter and I were on a little road trip one time. We were staying in a bed and breakfast. The guy who was checking us in was older. I said, “Yes, sir,” to him. He said, “Who the blank do you think I am? What do you mean, ‘yes sir’?” I said, “Look, it’s just my way. Sorry, it’s the way I was raised to be respectful.” Honor the presence of an older person. “Rise up before the gray-headed,” the Scripture says. All right, let’s move on to number six. Teach them to be eternity minded. To be eternity minded. First Timothy 4:7-8 NKJV says,

⁷ But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.

⁸ For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

There is a life to come, my friend. He said in 1 Timothy 5:24-25 NKJV,

²⁴ Some men’s sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. ²⁵ Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.

There is a coming judgment. There’s the great white throne of judgment for the unbelievers. There’s the judgment seat of Christ for believers. Now, friend, salvation is completely by grace and received by faith. But rewards are not by grace. Position throughout eternity is not by grace. It’s based on your obedience and your faithfulness to God during this short window we have here on earth. We will be judged according to our works, not for our salvation. If you put your trust in Christ, that’s one thing, but this is something else. The Apostle Paul talked about the judgment seat of Christ. He said, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” The very next words out of his mouth were, “Therefore, knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.” Apparently, the judgment seat of Christ even made the great Apostle Paul nervous. I think about it all the time. He said in 1 Timothy 6:7 NKJV,

⁷ For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

First Timothy 6:14 NKJV,

¹⁴ ...that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing.

Jesus is coming back. There is a coming judgment, and we take nothing out of this world with us. There will be a day of reckoning. I remember I read an article by James Dobson one time that really struck a chord with me. He came home one day, and his daughter said, “Dad, there’s this new game. It’s called Monopoly. Will you play it with us?” Now, Monopoly, I think, was

Lessons from a Father

invented in 1905, but she thought it was a new game. He just smiled. He said, "Okay." They start playing, and he said, "Pretty soon, old dad was just destroying everyone." He said, "I owned Park Place. I owned the expensive ones on the board and even the cheap ones." Like, what is it? Baltic Avenue and Mediterranean, whatever, the ones that nobody wants, if you've ever played Monopoly.

He said, "Pretty soon, it was clear to everyone that old Dad had played this game before." He said, "When I foreclosed on the final property, I got up, and I did a little victory jig in the living room, and the family wasn't happy at all." He says, "We quit the game. They all went to bed, and they told me I had to put the game away." He said, "I'm putting all the money back in the box and putting all the properties back in the box." He said, "I got this really empty feeling. All this excitement over the wealth and the ownership of this stuff was just an illusion. It all had to go back in the box when the game was over." He said, "You know what? It's not just about the game of Monopoly." He says, "The game of life, you struggle, you strain, and you sweat to get this and to get that, and to get a little more, and to do this, and then, suddenly, your heart stops, and everything goes back in the box."

Everything goes back into the box. You take nothing with you. There was a popular bumper sticker some years back that said, "He who dies with the most toys wins." It should say, "He who dies with the most toys dies anyway." Friend, there is a heaven to gain, there is a hell to shun, and there is a judgment waiting. This life is just a dressing room for eternity. We're just here for a moment. The book of James says, "This earthly life is a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." It still trips me out. I have grandsons that are teenagers now. Our oldest grandson, Asher, is getting to where he is almost as tall as I am. How did that happen? I was holding his father in my arms yesterday, or so it seems to me. Then I was holding my grandson in my arms just yesterday, or so it seems to me. Strange, the thought of being a great-grandfather. That's not too distant of a horizon for me. It happens like that. We need to be eternity minded. The seventh and final thing is a bit of contrast. I think fathers need to teach their kids to enjoy life. 1 Timothy 6:17 NKJV says,

¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

Everyone say, "Enjoy." We will give an account of our lives certainly, but that doesn't mean that we're supposed to lead gray, dreary, and colorless lives here on Earth. In the movie Braveheart, there's this line that William Wallace says. He says, "Everyone dies, but few men really live." Oh, that is so true. Enjoy creation. Explore, create, laugh, sing, and play. Prove the people wrong who think Christians are boring. Model it for your kids. Preach it to them. Tell them to live, to pursue their dreams, and to look at life as a great adventure. Go tell one of your Filipino friends that you want to try balut.

Live! When's the last time you jumped into an icy cold lake? When's the last time you laid on your back and looked at the clouds up in the sky? Have you ever put on a swim mask and looked under the surface of the ocean to see what's down there? It is amazing! When's the last time you listened to classical music, really, really loud? Live a little bit. Why not take your vacation time? Get yourself a passport. Go on a mission trip and help some people in a country and in an environment that's totally out of the box for you. God's given us richly all things to enjoy, and we should take the time to enjoy them. Decide to live and not just exist. Be creative. I think salvation is the great adventure. Knowing God. Jesus did not come to lead us into some sedate, mindless, ritualistic, and flavorless lifestyle. He came to lead a cosmic prison break and introduce us to the Creator of the cosmos, who we can know as Father.

Lessons from a Father

I think I have a fairly, and this might surprise some of you, but a fairly excessive personality. I'm quiet, but if I decide that I like something and I want to do something, I never do it halfway. I want to be all in. It's a good way to live. It's a wonderful life. With all of the troubles, with all the trials, with all of the things that are going on out there, there are still things that we can enjoy. That great adventure truly begins when we give our life to Christ and when we accept God's free gift of salvation. You'll find out that what you thought was adventure, what you thought was excitement, is nothing compared to what God has. He will lead you. He will guide you. Jesus said, "I came, that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly." That means overflowing life to the full. That's what He wants you to have. Will you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we thank You for examples like the Apostle Paul that we have in Scripture. We thank You for the practical things that we find in Your Word. But Lord, we know that behind it all, there is a supernatural God Who loves us and Who makes Himself real. Father, by Your Holy Spirit, I pray that even now, in this moment, You would make Yourself real to those who are here. To that one that's here for the first time, to the one that's out on the plaza, to the one that's watching, wherever they might be, I pray that Your presence would come upon them. That You would open the eyes of their understanding to the reality of their need of a Savior. Lord, I thank You that there are angels roundabout this auditorium and outside, moving in our midst, ministering to Your people, even as we're here in Your presence. We thank You for it. We worship You, Lord. We worship You, Lord. How we need You, how we desire You. We worship You, oh God.

Please, every head bowed, and every eye closed, just for a moment. In your heart of hearts, if you've never said "yes" to Jesus Christ, say "yes" to Him now. He died on the cross for your sins as your substitute. Judgment was coming your way. The wrath of God against sin, the justified wrath of God against sin, was headed your way. Jesus stood in between, and He took that punishment for you. The Bible says, "On Calvary's tree," according to Isaiah 53, "that His very soul was made an offering for sin." Paul writes to the Corinthians that, "He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us. That we might be made right with God in Him." Pray this prayer with me, say,

Oh God, I believe Jesus is Your Son. I believe He died on the cross for me and that He was raised from the dead. Jesus, come into my life. Be my Lord. Be my Savior. Amen.

Copyright © Answers with Bayless Conley