

# BodyLife Past Article Archive

## Living in Two Worlds

By Wayne Jacobsen

BodyLife • February 2004

I can't begin to comprehend what it would be like to wake up tomorrow morning and find myself free of everything that hinders or distracts me from life in Jesus.

No longer would I have to grope through the fog of my own selfishness to get a fading glimpse of God's presence for I would see God's face as clearly as he sees mine. No longer would I entertain, even for a moment, doubts about his love for me or his ability to draw me into the fullness of his life. No longer would the ravages of fleshly appetites lure me into bondage that can suffocate me in my own amusements.

I can only imagine what it would be like if every appetite for sin was suddenly silent and all I wanted was what God wanted for me. How would it be to live without a hint of fear, self-pity or envy because the demands of self have been swallowed up in the greatness of God? I would have nothing to hide, nothing to prove and nothing to win, because I would be so fully satisfied by God himself, and totally at rest in whatever he gives. What would it be like to have no needs to harass me, no conflict to afflict me, no pain or disease to limit me and no sorrow to wound me?

Then I could enjoy unlimited time and unrestricted insights into the beauty of God's nature and the wonder of his person. I could finally search out just how high and wide and deep his love runs for me and enjoy forever his infinite creativity and his boundless wisdom. What a life that would be!

Of course no one reading these words has any idea what that adventure will be like, but that day is fast approaching for all of us and it is closer now than when you began to read these words. It is what God made us for and what he steadily leads us to embrace.

## Beyond Death's Door

Obviously the full glory of what I describe here lies beyond death's door and from our vantage point it isn't easy to see. This world spares no expense to try and convince us that this is all there is. It beckons us to seek fulfillment in this age as if it was designed to provide it. The truth is it will never fulfill what our hearts long for most. Thinking it can will send us down the wrong paths and make us doubt God's intentions toward us when things don't work out as we think they should.

Life in this age is a mixed bag. At times we see the magnificence of God's glory in the creation and experience marvelous moments of his blessings and his refreshing. At other times we come face to face with the suffering and chaos of a world out of synch with its Creator. Though the world was painted in

God's glory, it was marred by sin and is now hemmed in by death. That's why God drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden after they had sinned. If they had eaten from the Tree of Life in their sinful state, they would have been eternally sinful. How can you rescue what is eternal? By condemning sin and its devastation to this age, God preserved eternity to be pure and holy and the safe haven to which he could bring us to share in the fullness of his glory.

Though death is the tool God uses to keep eternity unstained by sin, it is not his friend. Paul calls it God's enemy (I Cor. 15:26) and the last one he will destroy. He never wanted us to face death, neither the physical death that stalks our bodies in this age, nor the spiritual death that magnifies our selfish ambitions and hides us from the Father's love. We see it clearly in the devastation brought on by war, terrorism, crime, tragic accidents and disease. With each death of a loved one, or the growing aches and limitations of age we are reminded that everything in this age is destined to perish.

But for those who yearn to know God in his fullness, death has no sting. It is simply a doorway through which we will find our final freedom. It is not the dreaded end of our life on earth, but a doorway into the last, great adventure - the freedom to know him without limitation or distraction. For us, death will be waking up on some tomorrow morning finally free of this broken world and our sin-scarred bodies.

## **Only a Prologue**

On the last page of the last book of his Narnia tales, just when the reader thinks the story is over because the world has ended, C.S. Lewis pulls back the curtain even further: "For them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world... had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before." Lewis gets it exactly right. The time between our birth and our death is only a small slice of your story. When we look back from eternity we will know that the whole of our life in this age, that seems like everything to us now, was only the beginning. I suspect we'll remember it much like we remember kindergarten. That's how God looks at our life in this age, and Scripture encouragea us to as well. It repeatedly says that this world and our life in it are as brief as the dew on the morning grass, or a vapor of smoke that hangs briefly in the air. If we knew that we wouldn't be so devastated by our struggles or despair at life's disappointments. And we wouldn't fear death because we would see it not as the tragic end to life, but the beginning of life as God truly meant us to live it.

If we want to understand God's unfolding work in our lives, we must look beyond the prologue and include the whole of the story. If not, we'll miss God's work in our lives, yearning for true fulfillment in an age that cannot deliver it. This world exists in the brokenness and chaos of sin and even God's people face that every day. Our circumstances will never play out perfectly. We'll never have everything we want and we'll regularly face moments of conflict, struggle and pain. Even the best of times will not provide enduring satisfaction because we will never quite feel at home here.

Our home is in the Father's heart. Though we won't experience that fully until the end of the age, that doesn't need to stop us from enjoying the first-fruits of it in our life every day. The early apostles didn't think of eternal life only as life that would last forever, but as a quality of life lived in him. Eternal life is available now in Jesus. No wonder we feel caught between two worlds - living in one but drawing our life from another.

## **The World We Are In**

When Jesus prayed for his disciples in John 17 he specifically said his prayer was not that God would take them out of the world, but that God would keep them in the midst of it. They would be in the world, but they would no longer be of it. Tapping into God's reality supersedes everything about this age and clarifies how we can live freely in it.

But we all know that isn't easy. How distant the eternal can often feel when we get lost in our responsibilities at work and at home and by the myriad of amusements that our world offers. We think we'll find greater joy in a better job, a nicer home or a bigger bank account. The lie is that we will. We are constantly bombarded in news stories and TV shows, advertisements, and movies that life in this age can fulfill our deepest dreams. It creates in all of us the frustration that we could just strike it rich in business or luck out in the lottery, find the right soul mate, write that best-seller, or get a decent break for our creativity then we would finally find the fulfillment we desperately seek.

We forget that the media sell illusions not reality, like the endless contraptions that promise to take inches off our waistline without any effort from us. What makes it even more difficult is that these illusionists aren't just in the world, they are also among God's people, co-opting the reality of God's life by promising that if we just follow their program, prayer formula or other scheme God will make our wildest dreams come true.

Of course their wares sell well. Lies always do. But what happens when they don't work? The dream-merchants fly off in their Lear jets while the people who paid for it are left wondering what is wrong with them or with God that he didn't carve out an easy and prosperous life for them. This frustration at God and jealousy for the world's goods has shipwrecked many believers. While God will often give us moments of joy and refreshing, we live in the chaos of a sin-stained world and we will also experience seasons of great hardship, sorrow and pain. Anyone who says otherwise is trying to sell you something, and that something will not last. That's why Paul blasted the false teachers who said that godliness could lead to financial gain (I Timothy 6). He went on to say that the follower of Jesus would be content merely with food and clothes. Those who seek the fulfillment of wealth have never experienced the treasure that no amount of money can buy.

## **The World We Are Of**

Jesus offered an abundance of life to those who follow him, but he never defined that in material terms. I've seen people live in the fullness of that life even as they endured dire poverty, fought debilitating diseases and faced persecution for their faith. They didn't live out of the circumstances that assailed them but out of God's presence that filled them.

Our home can never be in Oxnard, California or Lagos, Nigeria. Our home is in the heart of the Living God. The life that really is life comes from him alone. It isn't measured in convenient or easy circumstances. This overwhelming sense of fullness and belonging comes simply from knowing the Father's presence in every circumstance whether good or bad. That life expresses itself in his voice that guides us, his comfort that holds us, and his strength that transforms us to be a bit more like him with each passing day.

In our lives God continues to invade this sin-stained world, and though he will not fix every circumstance to conform to my comfort, he has offered to share all of his life with me. He will hold me in times of suffering and laugh with me in times of joy. He will give my life meaning not by what I gain in this world, but by making me part of his unfolding purpose - to win the world back to himself through his overwhelming love.

His reality in our lives and our cooperation with him is the only well that can sate our quest for fulfillment in this world. This is eternal life and it began for us the day you gave your life to him. As we let him live in us, becoming more real than the world we touch, see and hear every day, he will create in us an oasis of eternity in the midst of the barren wasteland of our culture.

## **Living In the Eternal**

I love the way Paul thought through this:

***Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18)***

He fully faced the fact that outwardly death works to cause us to waste away in this age, but inwardly God's renewal offers us an inner glory that carries far more weight than anything in this life. So his determination is to fix his perspective not on what he could see around him, but on the unseen realm, those things that are eternal.

The only way to live in this world and not become of it is to stare into the face of our gracious Father. His eternal life has already begun in his followers. If we live in that reality we won't get sucked in by the

illusions of this age nor think our answers are found in its systems. Then we are free to cooperate with God's working in our own lives and in others around us.

That's why Paul could look at perilous circumstances and rise victorious through them. "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." (2 Corinthians 4:9) His presence in us is greater than anything the world can hurl at us. With our eyes fixed on him we do not have to surrender to the world we live in or retreat from it. We can fully embrace whatever unfolds knowing that God's greater purpose will go forward in our lives. This is living in the eternal: To taste of his rich presence every day that will not only guide us through it but will also overflow us and splash out onto a thirsty world.

Look to him early and often throughout your day. Ask him to make himself more real to you than anything in this world. Let him show you how to follow his voice and to see where his hand is moving in your life each day. Don't think that can only happen in special devotional times that you try to cram into all the other demands of the day. God wants to invade your world and walk with you through it, not wear you out with religious activity.

You'll find your values shifting from the temporary things that are destined to perish to embrace those things that live on through eternity. Possessions, amusements and achievements, will all come to nothing at the end of this age. You can enjoy what God gives you without being possessed by it. You can delight in the recreation God gives without being held captive by it. And you can do what he's asked you to do in this world without keeping score that exalts yourself over others.

Keeping your eye on what's eternal will help you navigate through the distractions of this world. When I took flying lessons as a teen-ager my instructor taught me to trust the instruments on the dash panel, rather than my feelings. To drive the point home he told me to close my eyes and hold the airplane straight and level. After a few seconds he asked how I was doing. I thought I was fine until he told me to open my eyes and I saw that the plane was in a steep bank and diving for the ground.

He made his point. By keeping my eyes on those instruments I could keep the plane level even if I couldn't see the horizon. That's why God wants us to keep our eyes on him and glance at the world, not the other way around.

## **A Life Worth Sharing**

Of course walking with your eye on the eternal is easier if you know other believers who share that focus. Have you noticed how much your heart covets the things of this world when you're around people who live for those things? The same is true of those focused on eternal things. We become like the people we hang out with. Real fellowship helps us see how God is working in our lives and will fill us with a greater

passion for that which has eternal value.

I am somewhat bothered that so many of our engagements with other believers gets lost in age-old theological controversies, speculations about the end times or trying to find the right church model for real New Testament community. Find people with their eyes on the eternal and you'll find yourself in the middle of fellowship that is real, encouraging, and fun. They will help you embrace the life that really is life rather than being sucked into the busyness of this world and the multitude of amusements it offers to seduce us back into its clutches.

Living in the eternal will not only refresh you in God's presence, but you will also discover that he will make you an oasis of eternal life for people battered by our broken world. You will be able to help mend the broken-hearted, bind up the wounded, love the outcast and liberate the captive.

Surely the fullness of our eternal life awaits a future day, but that need not stop you from participating in as much of it as Father makes available today.

---

© Copyright 2009 Lifestream Ministries

*Permission is hereby granted to anyone wishing to make copies for free distribution.*