

What Am I Missing?
Mark 10:17-22
September 20, 2020

If you had an option to live forever, would you want to live forever? Would that be a good thing? If you could and wanted to live forever, what would you be willing to do to live forever? I'm not talking about the eternal life, the life we find in Christ. I'm talking about everlasting physical existence.

In Hollywood, Florida, there is a church called the Church of Perpetual Life. It is not a Christian church. What they believe and preach is that as science and technology continue to advance, human beings will be able to conquer disease, aging, and even death. This church's motto is "Aging and death can be optional." Their purpose is to extend human life as long as possible.

The symbol of the Church of Perpetual Life is not a cross, but a phoenix, the bird in Greek mythology that rose from the dead and lives on forever. The leader of this church is Bill Faloon, and he teaches about health and age reversal technologies.

This church supports a practice of cryonics. Cryonics is the practice of freezing a corpse, a person's dead body in an extremely cold temperature with the intent of bringing them back to life when medical science has found a cure for the person's disease or even for death. Bill Faloon hopes to build a cryonic chamber in Texas that can hold 10,000 bodies, so its members can be brought back to life sometime in the future.¹ No one knows for sure if this would work.

But these are not the only people who believe that people will be able to live forever. There is an organization called the Coalition of Radical Life Extension, which promotes the idea that human beings can live forever. James Strole is the director of this organization. And he says, "There's millions of people now who won't see death if they choose."²

We will have to wait and see if their claims are true or not, but it seems like a lot of people are interested in these ideas. Perhaps because people don't want to die or cease to exist.

¹ "The transhumanists who want to live forever" by Antonio Regalado *MIT Technology Review*, Aug 16, 2019, <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/614078/transhumanists-live-forever/>.

² "Is Silicon Valley's quest for immortality a fate worse than death?" by Adam Gabbatt, *The Guardian*, Feb. 23, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/feb/22/silicon-valley-immortality-blood-infusion-gene-therapy>.

A man came to Jesus and knelt before him and asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

When the Bible talks about eternal life, it is not referring to an unending physical existence. A New Testament word for “eternal” is *aiónios*, which carries an idea of *quality* as well as *quantity*. It refers to godly quality in life. In fact, eternal life is NOT meant to be understood in relation to time. It is meant to be understood more in terms of quality of life than the length of time. The word eternal or *aiónios* is something that is outside of or beyond time.

Eternal life is something that we experience *here* and *now* and it will continue even after our physical body perishes. Eternal life is NOT something that starts when we die. It starts the moment we believe in Christ and exercise our faith in Christ. John 3:36 says, “Whoever believes in the Son HAS eternal life.” It doesn’t say, “Whoever believe in the Son WILL have eternal life.” It says, “Believers already have it.” In other words, eternal life is something we have now, and it will continue even after physical separation. But the heart of the eternal life is the quality of life, the godly quality, the presence of God, much more so than the length of time.

This young man wanted to experience the godly quality, the presence of God in his life. That is why he devoted himself in keeping the law. He honestly tried to serve God and be obedient to him. He kept the commandments as he understood them. He was so sincere that Jesus was impressed by him. The Bible describes Jesus’ reaction to this young man this way. When the young man said “I have kept all the commandments since I was a boy, Jesus looked at him and loved him.” Jesus was moved. He was impressed.

But this young man knew, by his own experience, that keeping the code of the law did not bring him fulfillment in life. No matter how hard he tried, he could not escape the sense of emptiness and incompleteness. Following the law is cold and impersonal, unless the reason for following the law is a deep love for the Lord.

When you just observe the law because you are told to do so, you don’t get a sense of closeness to the law-giver. What you are doing is just following the law. You are not deepening your relationship with the Lord. You are following the law because you are required to do so. When that happens, it is difficult to experience a sense of growth in your relationship with the Lord. This was what was happening with this young man. Deep down in his heart, this young man knew

something was missing. It was this lack of assurance and contentment that brought him to Jesus.

When religion is nothing more than a legalistic practice, we would feel the same emptiness and incompleteness. We would not grow in our relationship with the Lord unless we learn to trust him and rely upon him each and every day. If we do not build our personal relationship with the Lord, we will not have joy or the satisfaction of fulfillment in our faith journey, no matter what we do. We need to have a personal relationship with the Lord first and then keep God's commandments out of thankfulness and to be obedient to the Lord.

This young man's problem was that he believed eternal life was something he could earn by keeping the law. Look at his question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He had been working on earning the eternal life. He wasn't keeping the law because he loved God. He was keeping the law because he wanted to earn eternal life.

I suspect that deep down in his heart, he has not experienced the goodness of God. In his abundant wealth, I am sure he knew God had been good to him and he had blessed him greatly. But I wonder if he had a deep and close relationship with the Lord. Perhaps this is the reason why Jesus responded to him the way he did when this young man called Jesus a "good teacher." I always wondered why Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good – except God." I thought that was strange. What was wrong with calling Jesus a good teacher? And he was. So why did he respond the way he did? I wonder if Jesus responded the way he did to tell him that "God is good and you need to experience his goodness." Perhaps this young man had never experienced the goodness of God in his life. That was what was missing.

To him, Jesus said, "You lack only one thing. Go and sell everything you have and give the money to the poor – and you shall have treasure in heaven – and come, follow me."

He was basically saying, "You have been relying on your possessions to provide everything you need and want. You have been trusting your possessions more than anything. Your possessions have been your security, your fortress, your rock, your foundation, your everything. Let it go. Learn to be vulnerable. Then you will truly experience goodness of God."

The young man never expected this. The Bible tells us that this "man's face fell and he went away sadly, for he was very rich."

Notice, Jesus never told anyone to sell off all his possessions and give the money to the poor, except to this young man. For example, Nicodemus was a rich man but Jesus did not tell him to sell off all his possessions and give the money to the poor and follow him. Instead, he told Nicodemus to be born again. Jesus gave different instruction to different people, because their needs were different. So, why did Jesus ask this young man to give up his possessions?

Because to this young man, his material possessions were his security. It was what he relied on. He believed that his possessions were what sustained his life. His possessions were the most important things in his life. He had never been in a desperate situation to call upon the Lord. He had never faced a situation where he had to solely depend on God to deliver him. In other words, the very thing he lacked was the total reliance and absolute dependence on God.

In order to experience eternal life, to experience God's presence and his intervention in our lives, we need to depend on God. We need to trust him and to rely on him.

E. Stanley Jones tells of a missionary who served in Africa. One day, this missionary got lost in a jungle. He was surrounded by a thick forest. He walked for hours and finally found a small village. He asked one of the natives if he could lead him out of the jungle. The native said he could. So, the missionary asked him to show him the way. They walked for hours through the dense brush hacking their way through unmarked jungle. The missionary began to worry and asked, "Are you sure this is the way? Where is the path?" The native said, "Bwana, in this place, there is no path. I am the path."³

In order to come out of the jungle, the missionary had to completely rely on the native. He had to solely depend on his guidance. Having and experiencing eternal life requires our total reliance on God each and every moment.

Are we relying on God each and every day? Faith is not a religious practice or religious legalism. They certainly help us grow in our relationship with the Lord but more than anything, faith is to know God through Christ. It is to trust and obey him based on our knowledge and experience of God.

³ Brett Blair, an illustration on Relying on God, www.esermons.com.