

Editorial: *Your* Life Counts

There can be few people of compassionate heart who will not have been deeply saddened by media reports earlier this year concerning Northern Ireland's spiralling suicide rate, a problem particularly prevalent amongst young males. Contributing factors like poverty, unemployment, relationship break-ups, loneliness, dissatisfaction with life and the feeling little or nothing will ever change can perhaps all be traced to one issue alone – self-worth. Many feel unloved, unlovely and undervalued, with seemingly little power to make a positive impact for good on the world around them. Yet the reality is that an all-wise God sees things completely differently, and in this Editorial I hope to clearly show from Scripture that this is the case, with every life really counting.

1. Your life counts because of the value God places upon it

There probably is not a human being alive today who does not want to be loved, accepted, appreciated and respected by other people - to mean something to somebody. Yet to measure our value by the shifting sands of others' opinions is to use an unwise benchmark, as it is God who determines our value. A little chorus says "When He was on the cross, I was on His mind". What may seem sentimental, though, does have a sound scriptural basis – "... Jesus ... who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame ..." (Heb 12:2). What was "the joy" here spoken of? It was the knowledge of all those who would be saved from eternal misery through His finished work on Calvary, who "through His poverty might be rich." (2 Cor 8:9) Are you searching today for answers that can only be found in Christ? God held back nothing, but gave His very best, with Jesus doing for us what we can never achieve by our own merit. But our lives not only have value because of what God has *done*, but also because of what He wants to *do*. He knows the very worst about us, yet accepts and loves us as we are - though He loves us too much to leave us that way. Will you allow Him to give *you* a new future?

2. Your life counts because of the impact it has upon other people

Paul, writing to the Romans, accurately states "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" (Rom 14:7). None of us live in splendid isolation - regardless of our sphere of influence, our lives impact on other people every day. A sign within an office where I formerly worked read "Everyone brings joy to this office – some when they enter, others when they leave!" The message, though humorous, is clear – each life has an impact, some favourable, others much less so. It has been estimated, in a normal life span, that the life of an average person has a direct impact on at least 10,000 other lives. The question is – is your life impacting others for good and for God?

John Wesley had a noble rule for his life – "Do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, for as long as you can." How wise! Someone has said "You and I were created to tell the truth about God by reflecting His likeness ... How many lies have you told about God today? As Christians, our words and deeds, our actions and reactions are closely scrutinised every day. "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:" (2 Cor 3:2). C.H. Spurgeon once declared "The sermons most needed today are sermons in stones." The Lord Jesus taught that we are to be salt and light amidst the society in which we live. (Mt 5:13-14) Do we exercise a purifying influence amidst the prevailing corruption, and are we "blameless and harmless ... without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world. (Phil 2:14-15)?

3. Your life counts because of the legacy you will leave

Early this year I became the proud owner of a digital camera. The one thing I loved most about this wonderful gadget is the fact the photo taken is immediately seen, and, if the snap doesn't fit the bill, the photo can simply be erased and re-taken as often as necessary until it is just right. Life, however, is not like this – we get one chance to get it right. Whilst attending a recent funeral, I was struck by the fitting tributes paid to the many noble qualities of the dear Christian gentleman who had died, and I couldn't help but wonder if similar things could one day be said of me. Yet such would be dependent upon my living aright, day by day, month by month, and year by year – beginning, not when I retire, but *starting right now*. What are *you* living for, dear reader, and where do *your* priorities lie?

Bob Gass, writing in the Word for Today, points to five things that live on after we die: - 1. Our investments for Christ in people. 2. Our prayers before God's throne. 3. The power of our life's story to inspire others. 4. The impact of our giving. 5. The physical and spiritual DNA our children will carry into life. How many, in their latter years, have regretted their obsession with work, money, the acquisition of possessions and the pursuit of pleasure. Yet, it is equally true that few have ever regretted spending too much time really getting to know their spouse, being there for and watching their families growing up, or in helping others, faithfully serving God, and seeking to reach others for Him – all things which create a lasting legacy that will long be cherished – “the memory of the just is blessed” (Prov 10:7)

4. Your life counts because it has eternal implications

A view gaining increasing acceptance today is that man can live as he pleases without any ill consequences. God's revealed mind clearly indicates otherwise – “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” (Gal 6:7) “I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” (Jer 17:10) Yes, our choices and decisions have eternal significance, firstly and most fundamentally how we answer the question “What shall I do then with Christ?” as our eternal destiny is sealed by our acceptance or rejection of Him. Never forget, the longest earthly life is but as a single droplet compared with the vast ocean of God's unending eternity. The issue, therefore, could not be more serious.

Sadly, though, it is all too possible to know Christ as Saviour, to walk the heavenward road, and yet still to arrive home empty-handed. I recently heard someone comment that there is only one thing we have on earth that we can take with us to heaven – our children, if we reach them for Christ. The same, of course, is true of any loved one or indeed anyone who crosses our pathway, and who are led to trust Christ through our influence, witness and testimony. So, are we pre-occupied with earthly gain, or are we seeking to lay up treasure in heaven, having our heart there, and desiring to bring others there too (see Matthew 6:20-21)? Do we seek only earthly honour, or are we striving to obtain an incorruptible crown (1 Cor 9:25) that fades not away (1 Pet 5:4)? In doing the latter we have the assurance our labour will never be in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor 15:58) “And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.” (Daniel 12:3)