

Three Great and Encouraging Truths
Proverbs 23:7-12
January 24, 2010

Did you see the Lockhorns comic strip in last Sunday's paper? Leroy and Loretta Lockhorn are sitting in church listening to the sermon. Leroy turns to his wife Loretta and says: "Is this guy paid by the word?"

Preachers can be very hard to understand!
I hope that you can clearly understand what I am going to say because I feel these thoughts can be very helpful to you.

They are three great and encouraging truths, and our lesson is taken from Proverbs 23: 12 as the wise writer says "apply your mind to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge."

We need to follow the advice of this lesson, and we need to apply our minds to wisdom and truth. Over the years, there have been many great words of instruction, knowledge, wisdom and truth.

I think of the many philosophical words that have been spoken. Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am."
Socrates said, "Ultimate truth can be established by reason."

Plato explained that the mind and the body are two separate entities, following that process, each should be treated accordingly.

Aristotle introduced his logic into philosophy, and this logic had a profound influence upon Thomas Aquinas, and Aquinas greatly influenced theology, especially through his book, Summa Theologica.

There're many great scriptural truths that can be instructive to us.

In the book of Genesis, we are given insight into the great Hebrew Testament truth about God's providence.

When Joseph's brothers sold them into slavery, he lifted up the words of truth, "you have meant this for evil, but God will use it for good."

David lifted up a great and encouraging biblical truth when he said, "the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

And so did Isaiah when he said, "Thou shall keep him in perfect peace whose mind is set upon thee."

And so did Jeremiah in his Lamentations when he said "God's compassion's fail not. They are new every morning."

And the apostle Paul gives us insight into the New Testament truth of God's providence when he says in Romans 8:28, "we know that all things work together for good for those who love the Lord."

Today I challenge you to seek three great and encouraging truths that will add a new dimension of meaning and effectiveness to your life.

The truths are: (1) Life is worth living, (2) People are worth loving, (3) God is worth trusting.

One: life is worth living

Now just for a moment, I want you to grasp and lay hold of the fact that life IS worth living. I want you to believe that life is good.

Following God's mighty act of creation in the book of Genesis, the very first thing God said was, "it is good," and Life is worth living.

Now there are many people who have difficulty believing this truth. There're even more people who have difficulty living out this great truth.

I read about a man who lifted up this prayer to the Lord:

“So far today, God, I have done all right. I haven't been greedy. I haven't gossiped, and I have not lost my temper.

I have not been grumpy, or nasty or selfish, or over-indulgent. I am very thankful for that. But in a few minutes, God, I'm going to get out of bed, and from then on I am going to need a whole lot of help.”

Yes, some people have difficulty getting started, but life is good, and life is worth living.

Now, just for a moment I want you to seriously consider these great and encouraging truths: Life Is Worth Living, but you must make it so for your life. You must decide that life is worth living

The great American playwright Neil Simon said, “It is so important to know that you can feel good. Most people don't know they have that choice.” It is your choice.

The real tragedy is many people never realize the worth of life until they experience the nearness of death.

When singer Nat King Cole was on his deathbed, he said, “For the first time in my life, the things which I thought were so very important now are not important, and of those things I deemed un-important are now the most important things in the world.”

One of the most important and encouraging truths in the world is that life is worth living for you now.

One of my heroes is Helen Keller. She was one of the greatest Americans to ever live and I am greatly inspired by her life.

She wrote a little devotional book entitled, “Three days to See,” and she describes what she would do during the course of three sighted days in her life. She writes:

“I have often thought it would be a blessing if each human being was stricken blind and deaf for a few days at some time during their early adult life.

Darkness would make them more appreciative of sight; silence would teach them the joys of sound. I can find hundreds of things to interest me through mere touch.

I feel the delicate symmetry of the leaf. I pass my hands lovingly about the smooth skin of the Silver birch, or the rough, shaggy bark of a pine.

In spring, I touch the branches of trees hopefully in search of a bud, the first sign of awakening nature after her winter sleep. I feel that the light full velvety texture of a flower.

Occasionally, if I am very fortunate, I placed my hand gently on a small tree and feel the quiver of a bird in full song.

I am delighted to have the cool waters of the brook rush through my open fingers.
To me a lush carpet of pine needles or spongy grass is more welcome than the most luxurious Persian rug.

I too am blind, but can give one hint to those who see: use your eyes as if tomorrow you would be stricken blind. Hear the music of voices, the song of a bird, and the mighty strings of an orchestra as if you would be stricken deaf.

Touch each object you want to touch as if tomorrow your senses would fail. Smell the perfume of flowers, taste with relish each morsel, as if tomorrow you could never smell and taste again.

Make the most of every sense; glory in all the facets of pleasure and beauty.”

This very day, I pray that you will adopt the philosophy of Helen Keller, and you will embrace this great truth: life is worth living!

(2) People are worth loving.

Page 5

People are jewels that God has put into the crown of life, and people are truly worth treasuring, affirming, celebrating and loving.

I read where Vincent Van Gogh's masterpiece, "Irises", sold for nearly \$54 million dollars. Actually, the price was 53.9 million.

The painting depicts a patch of purple irises and a white bloom in a flower garden at the St. Remy Asylum where the famous artists committed suicide at the age of 37.

When I read that, I wondered why Van Gogh never realized the worth of the treasure, but even worse is that many people do not realize the worth of the valuable treasures around them this very day.

Treasures like family, like friends and like people, whose basic desire is to be loved; are worthy of our love because they are created in the very image of God.

Abraham Lincoln knew and understood this great truth: People, regardless of what they do, are always worth loving.

When the Civil War was about to come to an end Pres. Lincoln was approached by the Radical Republican leaders Charles Sumner, Thaddeus Stephens, and Benjamin Wade.

They approached the president, and with voices dripping with venom, they demanded to know how Lincoln was going to treat the rebellious Southerners after the war.

Pres. Lincoln, the man who said, "with malice toward none and charity for all," this man who genuinely felt that people everywhere were worthy of love said, "How am I going to treat them? I am going to treat them as though they never even left."

Yes, people are worth loving

(3) God is worth trusting.

May I challenge you to commit these verses to memory? They are such excellent verses to introduce this point, and they are verses that can make the load much lighter for you.

The verses are Proverbs 3:5&6: “trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge God, and God will make straight your paths.”

One of the most brilliant theologians of the 20th century was Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr. He once pastored a small church in Detroit.

Later on in his life, Reinhold and his brother Richard had a tremendous impact upon Christian theology, especially in the field of ethics.

Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr taught Christian Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

He authored a number of books, including Moral Man and Immoral Society and The Nature and Destiny of Man, two volumes that are considered standards in the field of Christian theology and ethics.

Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr’s father had been a Lutheran Pastor. When Reinhold was 21 years of age, his father died. The next Sunday morning, young Reinhold climbed into his father's vacant pulpit and he shared with the congregation this helpful story.

He told of how as a child he would spend the day with his grandmother. It was an occasion he always looked forward to and enjoyed. His father would come to get him at the end of the day.

Late one afternoon while he was visiting his grandmother there was a terrible storm. His father arrived to get him. Reinhold Niebuhr said that the thing he remembered about his dad was that he was wearing a big, blue rain coat.

His father took him by the hand, opened the rain coat and said, "Come under here, son."

He told of how he slipped under the coat and the two of them left. They walked through the front door out onto the big porch and down the steps.

They walked through the mud, and they waded through puddles. All the time, Reinhold could hear the loud clash of thunder in the rain pouring down on them.

He also could see flashes of lightning through the raincoat but with every step, his father held his hand more tightly.

Reinhold Niebuhr said, "I didn't complain about the darkness, for I was covered under my father's coat, protecting me from the weather. My father could see the path. And that was enough for me."

Then Reinhold Niebuhr shared this powerful thought: "Of course, my father brought me home. Where else should he have taken me?"

So it is with our God. If only we will trust him. God takes hold of our hand, covers us under his hand and leads us through the storm.

For all, there are those times when the way is dark, the storm is fierce and the heart is broken. Especially during those times we need to know that our great God is worth trusting.

During the early 1930s, a minister by the name of Thomas Dorsey, experienced the storm. His dear wife and little baby both died in childbirth. Rev. Dorsey was devastated. He was crushed. He was inconsolable. Nothing could help.

He kept crying out, "Lord, Lord, Lord". Then one of his parishioners said to him, "Rev. Dorsey, not Lord, but precious Lord."

These words rapidly came to Thomas Dorsey's mind, and in the course of a few moments he wrote them down.

They are very familiar words that you know and love. They underscore the reality of this third great truth. Dorsey wrote:

“Precious Lord take my hand, lead me on, let me stand.
I am tired I am weak, I am worn; through the storm,
through the night, lead me on to the light.
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.”

The writer of Proverbs said, “Apply your mind to instruction and your ears to the words of knowledge.”

I challenge you this day to apply your mind to these encouraging words of wisdom and truth:

One, life is worth living.

Two, people are worth loving.

Three God is worth trusting.

AMEN!