

Do you have a Fitbit (**picture**)? It's one of the latest exercise crazes. Since 2010, Fitbit has sold more than 38 million devices with over 16 million active users. At \$200 a pop you'd better use it. But new studies show that it's hard to persuade people to exercise, even with a fitness tracker counting your steps. Even when people were rewarded with cash for being active, they show little improvement in their exercise routine. As one expert observed, "We found just giving people a device doesn't necessarily mean it's going to result in something you think it's going to result in. These activity trackers really don't engage people in strategies that make a difference in terms of long-term lifestyle change." Here's the problem – the Fitbit can't *inspire*; it can only *inform*. It's not a Fitbit that motivates you to exercise; it's your motivation to exercise that gets you interested in a Fitbit! *Measurement* is one thing. *Motivation* is another. In other words, a Fitbit can track your heart rate, but can't change your heart.

Too often, when we think about godliness and spiritual maturity, we think in terms of Fitbits. We reason that if we just teach people about what matters, warn them away from the consequences of sin, then they'll focus on what's important. We believe if we just give people tools that can track their spiritual habits and practices; Bible reading plans, prayer journals, classes... then that will be the silver bullet to get people "walking" more with the Lord.

We need to be grateful for these tools, but measurement doesn't motivate. These tools are like a Fitbit. They're a nice way to track your progress in a spiritual discipline, but unless your motivation comes from something deeper than tracking your progress, you're probably not going to stick with it.

Sometimes we need a wake-up call. Professional golfer Paul Azinger (**picture**) got one. Azinger was at the height of his professional golf career when the doctor told him he had life-threatening cancer. Up to that point, he hadn't thought much about dying. Life was all too consuming for him to stop and consider the reality of death and eternity. That encounter with the brevity of life brought an immediate reality check. His life would never be the same again. Even the \$1.46 million he'd made that year paled to insignificance. He remembered the words of the chaplain of the tour: "*We think that we are in the land of the living going to the land of the dying, when in reality we are in the land of the dying headed for the land of the living.*"

Only when you embrace the reality of eternity, embrace the real world, is your worldview radically changed. Then, our values are prioritized. Time, money, things, family, friends...life itself are all adjusted and given their appropriate worth and place.

If anyone should know the reality of eternity, it's us – we who have been guaranteed safe passage to the other side through Jesus Christ, our divine passport. Yet, for too many of us, it's like a fitbit we have but never use. We know this world is not all there is but we live like it is. We're consumed with the tyranny of the temporal. Unless eternity is our default setting, life is compressed into the distorted assumption that this is all there is...and it's never quite enough.

This year, because of the construction of a new building, we can't help but be focused on a chunk of earth. But the new building is merely a Kingdom tool. Someday it will all be consumed by fire. It's vital that we make certain our lives and this ministry have eternal significance. That's why our 2017 theme is: *From Here To Eternity, Living Beyond the Now*. Our verse of the year is 1 Corinthians 15:58 (**picture**), "*Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*" I appreciate the work Jillian Cannon did putting this together.

Everything hinges on that last phrase, "*knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*" It's living for the real world, **living beyond the now**. This summer we'll return to this more thoroughly. But today, we want to work through a prequel. Why must we live for eternity? Why must we live beyond today and the now?

1. Christ's resurrection reminds us that there is so much more. Paul says, "*Therefore, my beloved....*" Whenever you see the word "*therefore*" in Scripture, you should ask, "What's the '*therefore*' there for?" Here it points us back to the previous verses of this magnificent chapter. 1 Corinthians 15 is Paul's great explanation of the event and the meaning of Jesus' resurrection. "*[Jesus] Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day...*" Because Jesus is alive, those who put their trust in Him are also made alive, and made to live forever, in new, resurrected bodies free from sin, sickness and death.

Why should we live for eternity? Why live a life of righteousness instead of following our sinful passions? Because sin leads to death. "*The wages of sin is death.*" Jesus came so we could have life and have it to the fullest.

Jesus Christ lives. He's not still in the grave. Because He lives, we can live in Him by His resurrection power. This is why "*Therefore*" begins our verse. We can and must live lives committed to the Lord because Jesus Christ lives! When we believe this world is all there is, it distorts our thinking and we easily succumb to one of two errors.

a. The error of hedonism. We want to get as much pleasure and comfort as we possibly can. It's *carpe Diem*, seize the day. This is all we get, so enjoy it. Our life theme becomes, "If it feels good, do it." This is it. There are no consequences, so let's get all we can while we can, now.

b. The error of hopelessness. We think if this is all there is, life has no meaning and little value. These are the philosophers of despair, weighed down by the hopelessness of it all. There's no assurance of a future.

And we all battle with these two worldviews. If this world really is all there is, we either are obsessed with pleasure or drown in hopelessness.

We find ourselves in the position of James Acliff. On the afternoon of August 2, 1997, James Acliff, a 39-year-old unemployed construction worker, woke up in a precarious position. He woke up and found himself lying face down between the rails of a railroad track. Later, Acliff told police he "slipped" on a rock while walking his dog and was knocked unconscious.

When he finally came too, he soon realized he wasn't alone...passing over him was a 109-car freight train. "I got one terrible headache, let me tell ya," he later said from his Florida hospital bed. "About every 3 or 4 seconds an axle would come along and crack me upside the head. It's a good thing I wasn't on my back or that train would have ripped my face off!"

The moral of the story? There are some places where we can't afford to fall asleep! This life is one of those places! Yet, the Church has been called "a sleeping giant." Too often we're not just drowsy, we're nearly comatose!

The typical Christian is complacent. Comfort and entertainment preoccupy us. We have little appetite for the things of God. There's no burning passion to invest our lives in the cause of Christ. We're satisfied with an "*appearance of godliness*," callously standing by as the world goes into a Christless eternity. A. W. Tozer (**picture**) said, "*One of the greatest foes of the Church – is religious complacency. We have fallen to our present state of carnality from a lack of spiritual desire. Among the many who profess faith in the Lord, scarcely one in a thousand possesses any real passion for God!*"

Contemporary Christianity stands on the precipice of irrelevance because we're focused on the wrong world. We've forgotten the only message that can give our lives value or rescue our lost world. What will it take to jar us out of our spiritual lethargy? The answer is the resurrection, eternity. This life is little more than a dress rehearsal. Everything we believe, everything we could ever hope to accomplish is through the same resurrection power that raised Christ from the dead. So...

2. Because this life is not the end...

a. We must persevere. "*Be steadfast.*" Faith in the resurrection motivates us to persevere. That's what's implied by the word "*steadfast.*" The Greek word means "*to be settled or firmly situated.*"

Football great, Walter Payton (**picture**) played for thirteen years as a running back for the Chicago Bears. During his career he rushed for 16,726 yards. That's more than nine miles. But what makes that figure even more astounding is that he achieved it with someone knocking him down every 4.6 yards. What does it mean for a believer to persevere? It means you...

Stand by your convictions. A person with convictions knows what they believe and why. Convictions aren't forced on an individual. They're beliefs followed up by actions of choice. They're the truth, the mission, the calling given by God that's not altered by time, people, opinions, or circumstances.

Martin Luther King, Jr. (**picture**) often told his children, "*If a man has nothing that is worth dying for, he is not fit to live.*" Persevering means sticking to what you believe so much that you're willing to die for it. The one who perseveres in obedience lives by those convictions day after day. To persevere means you...

Make the right choices. People who persevere choose not to stay down. They get back up. Choices we make today affect tomorrow. As Jean-Paul Sartre (**picture**) wrote, "*We are our choices.*"

Obedience is always a choice. No one forces us to obey God's Word or His will. It boils down to a choice we make each day - a choice to be faithful, to be loving, to be available, to be willing. The choices that determine our obedience are the ones regarding honesty, integrity, and sincerity.

It's the spouse who remains faithful and loyal to their mate. It's the student who "cracks the books" rather than opting for the easy road of "crib sheets." It's the salesperson who doesn't pad their expense account.

Doug Sherman and William Hendricks in their book, *How To Succeed Where It Really Counts* (**picture**), tell of two friends who owned an extremely profitable business. They put it up for sale and gave their word that, pending a few details, they'd sell to a particular buyer. They made their decision on a Friday. However, over the weekend they received another offer that would have netted them an enormously higher profit. Unsure of what they should do, they spent the rest of the weekend praying about it with their wives. By Sunday night they all agreed that their word must be their bond.

So on Monday morning, they called the second buyer and turned down his better offer. They made their decision, not based on dollars, but on obedience to right living. To persevere also means you...

Maintain godly character. The most pressing need in the Church and in our world is Christ-like character. Character is in short supply. Gail Sheehy in her book, *Character: America's Search for Leadership*, writes, "The root of the word character is the Greek word for engraving. As applied to human beings, it refers to the enduring marks left by life that set one apart as an individual." Character is that vital ingredient in life that makes us distinctly different from those who don't know Jesus. To persevere means you...

Refuse to compromise. Obviously, there are some circumstances where we need to compromise, but we must never compromise the truth. Christian history is filled with powerful accounts of believers who are immortalized for refusing to compromise their beliefs.

In the 1660's, King Charles II did away with religious freedom. It was illegal to conduct worship services outside of the Church of England. Unlicensed individuals were forbidden from addressing a religious gathering.

Under these new laws, John Bunyan (**picture**) was arrested for preaching without a license. His growing popularity, though, prompted the judge to seek some sort of a compromise. Promising Bunyan immediate release if he only promised not to preach again, the judge's leniency was met with the reply, "If you release me today, I shall preach tomorrow!" Three times during his life Bunyan was jailed for preaching without a license. In the end, he spent over twelve years in prison. At any time during those years he could have secured his freedom by just promising not to preach. He knew God's calling on his life, so he adamantly refused to compromise his convictions. Those prison years weren't wasted. It was during this time that Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*. It's still a classic today and the second most read book in English literature next to the Bible. And there are Christians around the world imprisoned because they refuse to compromise their faith and give in to government edicts. When it comes to biblical convictions, we must stand for Christ and His Kingdom principles.

b. We must not waver. "Immovable." This world attempts to marginalize the Church or make Christians look stupid? We must determine to be immovable!

A skeptic and a preacher were debating the Bible. In the course of their discussion, the skeptic said, "You don't really believe in the Bible. Because if you did, you wouldn't be able to sleep at night until everyone you knew believed in Jesus!" He had a valid point. We claim to believe in heaven and hell. We say "Jesus is the only answer for sin and the only way to be right with God." We say all the right words and talk a pretty good talk, but if we believe that lost people really go to Hell, why don't we share the gospel?

Sometimes we try to deflect the heat off of ourselves by rationalizing that it's not our responsibility or hoping someone else will do the job God put us here to do. Paul says, "*be immovable.*" Don't allow the fear of rejection or ridicule prevent you from doing what you're called to do. If Jesus is alive, that reality should strengthen our resolve and will.

c. We must go for it, "always abounding in the work of the Lord." "Abounding" carries the idea of "*exceeding the requirements...of going above and beyond the minimum.*" Since God has been so good to us, saved us, blessed us and forgiven us, He deserves a people who do so much more than just the minimum. *Abounding* is the soldier on the battlefield who sees a wounded comrade and carries him back to safety. It's the employee at the office that offers to stay late to get a project done. It's the bone weary husband who helps to put the kids to bed. It's going the extra mile.

James Garner, in the movie, *Castaway Cowboy* (**picture**), said to a young boy, "*Don't ever expect praise for doing your job.*" Appreciation should be given for a job well done, but the one doing the work should never base his work on the praise of the boss. Everyone should do his duty, but a believer must never stop with just his duty.

Jesus taught His followers that if a Roman soldier compelled them to carry his load for one mile, they should do that. Then, in a spirit of cooperation and good will offer to carry it another mile. That would certainly give the soldier something to write home about!

Heroes in American history were those who were committed to doing their job. But they didn't think of themselves as heroes. When asked, they were often surprised that anyone would think of them as heroes.

A couple of summers ago Jane and I visited the home of Sergeant Alvin York (**picture**). Sergeant York was the epitome of humility. After returning from World War I, as the most decorated hero of that war, he was offered money, fame, job opportunities that would have been very tempting to most. He asked, "You mean they are doing that because of what I did over there?" When he was told there were people who wanted to capitalize on what he'd done in battle, he responded that he couldn't do that. He just wanted to go home, get married and start farming.

Sergeant York received the Medal of Honor for leading an attack on a German machine gun nest, taking out 35 machine guns, killing at least 28 German soldiers, and capturing 132 others. Officers were amazed. When one officer tried to get him to explain what he'd done, he explained that his men were being cut down and he had to do something to save them. In other words, the officer concluded, "You did all that, not to kill the enemy but to save the lives of your

men?" Just doing our duty is not enough. *"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going"* (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

Duty requires the minimum, love for the Lord demands our best. You can do your duty without commitment or compassion. Some years ago there was a TV show that showed people doing a variety of jobs. When they finished they stopped and looked at their work. The announcer asked, "Would you be willing to sign your name to your work?" There's a lot of difference in the attitude, "I was just doing my duty," and the "That's a job well done" attitude. We're to go for it, *"always abounding in the work of the Lord."* That's so much more than duty. Are you here this morning out of duty? Do you read your Bible, pray, serve or give out of duty?

d. We're confident that it really matters. One of the greatest public servants in the history of England was William Gladstone (**picture**), (1809–1898). Gladstone served as Prime Minister four times during the latter half of the 19th Century. He was also a committed Christian who faithfully attended church and taught a Sunday School class throughout his adult life. His goal early in his life was to become an Anglican clergyman, but after graduation from Oxford, his father insisted that he enter politics. Shortly before he died, Gladstone gave a speech in which he told about being visited by an ambitious young man who sought his advice about life. The young man told the now elder statesman that he admired him more than anyone living and wanted to seek his advice regarding his career.

"What do you hope to do when you graduate from college?" Gladstone asked. The young man replied, "I hope to attend law school, sir, just as you did." "That's a noble goal," said Gladstone, "Then what?" "I hope to practice law and make a good name for myself defending the poor and the outcasts of society, just as you did." "That's a noble purpose," replied Gladstone. "Then what?" "Well, sir, I hope one day to stand for Parliament and become a servant of the people, even as you did." "That too is a noble hope. What then?" asked Gladstone. "I would hope to be able to serve in the Parliament with great distinction, evidencing integrity and a concern for justice — even as you did." "What then?" asked Gladstone. "I would hope to serve the government as Prime Minister with the same vigor, dedication, vision, and integrity as you did." "And what then?" asked Gladstone. "I would hope to retire with honors and write my memoirs — even as you are presently doing — so that others could learn from my mistakes and triumphs." "All of that is very noble," said Gladstone, "and then what?" The young man thought for a moment. "Well, sir, I suppose I will then die." "That's correct," said Gladstone. "And then what?" The young man looked puzzled. "Well, sir," he answered hesitantly, "I've never given that any thought."

"Young man," William Gladstone responded, "the only advice I have for you is for you to go home, read your Bible, and think about eternity."

Think about eternity! What great advice! Life goes by so quickly – like a vapor – here one moment, gone the next. We must prepare for eternity! Paul brings it all home with, *"knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."*

Your effort isn't worthless in the Lord. If you follow Christ, many times it's hard work. Always fighting against the sin that so easily entangles you. Always having to keep your wits about you to look out for danger, to be alert for the devil. But take heart! Your work, your toil, your fighting is not worthless because the Lord Jesus Christ lives!

What are you really living for? What are you focused on? We live like we're going to live forever, when the fact is we're all mortal and can die at any moment from a thousand different causes, natural or accidental. Ironically, the Bible tells us that we're to live like we're going to live forever — but not on this earth. We're to live now in preparation for eternity.

Maybe you find it difficult to maintain an eternal perspective. You repeatedly find yourself caught up with the stuff of this world, or the problems of life. What's your attitude about this world? What are you living for? Do you have an eternal perspective? Are you focused on what matters?

Conclusion: One of the worst train disasters in history happened in Spain in 1944. It was a long passenger train with an engine on each end. This train was on its way through a tunnel when the front engine stalled, so the engineer in the rear engine started up and started to back out of the tunnel.

Meanwhile, the front engineer got the front engine going again. With no way to contact each other, both engines continued to pull in opposite directions. Full-speed ahead in both directions means that you're stationary...and they were in a tunnel. Over 500 people died of carbon monoxide poisoning. All those people died for one reason alone: the train stopped moving. If we're just living for this life, we're really not moving.

There are times we get discouraged. We wonder if the Christian life, being faithful, being obedient, is worth it. There will be times when you wonder if a life of sin would be more pleasant than a godly life. You wonder if it's worth it, or if you should just throw in the towel.

As we tie this up, let me encourage you to keep moving forward. If you've stopped moving, get moving again.

Here are **four ways to make each day count for eternity**. As those who've been resurrected, we want to live with eternity in view. How can we do that?

Make returning to Jesus a way of life. When Jesus said, “Follow me,” he wasn’t asking His disciples for a one-time decision to put Him on the top of their to-do list. He was inviting them to an ongoing relationship based on authenticity, intimacy and sacrifice. For us, this devotion is expressed in an intimate relationship with Jesus where we communicate with Him in daily Bible reading and prayer, where we respond to Him through submission to His will, where we live in community with other believers and where we invite others to also follow Him through our witness and service. It won’t be easy but His grace is sufficient. Practically, then, repentance isn’t just for the wayward prodigal living in rebellion; it’s for the most committed Christ-followers who battle with the prodigal still loitering inside of our hearts, tempting us to run away with him.

Make plans that build people. When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, he made a plan to rebuild the wall around the city. Then he got to work. 52 days later, they finished the wall. It was a remarkable accomplishment. However, Nehemiah’s ultimate goal was not to rebuild a wall, but to rebuild a people.

God’s redeeming work is still to restore a people to Himself for His glory. Our relationships, finances, hobbies and career are God’s provision for us to display the gospel as we invest in people. God has not called us to make something of our lives. He’s called us to die to ourselves and to live to make much of Jesus and the new life He gives to everyone who will trust in Him.

Make room for unknown opportunities. It’s wise to set goals and make plans. It’s wiser still to place every plan under the subjection of God. Scripture says, “*A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord determines his steps*” (Prov. 16:9). Some of our so-called failures may result in us listening to God and obeying Him for something much better than our best made plans. We pray and plan, but we recognize that only God is sovereign. As we seek Him first, we make ourselves available to Him and adjust our lives along the way. This isn’t a rationale for poor planning, undisciplined living or excuse making. Rather, it’s a humble awareness that our inflexible allegiance to our plans could lead us away from God rather than toward Him.

Make obedience an action. Plans are for paper. Listening to and obeying God moves us to act. It’s easier to make plans than act on them. The snooze button wins our attention, or the Facebook status distracts us just long enough to detour us from even the simplest of tasks.

Knowing God’s will, agreeing with God’s will, even celebrating God’s will are not the same things as doing God’s will. We must learn to think deeply on the things of God and to prayerfully seek Jesus first. His Kingdom advances through those who take the time and make the effort to act. So whether the work is majestic or mundane, celebrated or ridiculed, noticed or obscure, we do it with all of our heart because we’re living for eternity.

We manage our calendar, eliminate distractions, build relationships that encourage us to fulfill our calling, and then we keep our heart tender toward Jesus. Only He can produce lasting fruit through us (John 15:5).

Can one day on the calendar really make a difference? When we join the Ancient of Days in His eternal work to redeem sinners and restore the world for the glory of God, every day makes a difference. “*Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*”