

“What’s Your Why”

I Timothy 6:6-19

Intro

What drives you?

Is it the fear of what you don’t have (and therefore the desire to acquire more so as to not miss out)? And those desires can certainly be based on your own wants and dreams, or your expectations as you compare yourself to others. Is that what drives you? Or, is it the recognition and the desire to utilize what you do have to yes, support yourself and your family, but when possible to care for other folks as well?

Now I get that it’s not just the polar extremes as presented that exist in the midst of our lives, but I also recognize there are more than a few times when we are able to articulate where we actually abide by declaring that we are not this, that, or the other.

So again, what drives you? What is your why?

The reality is that our why shapes not only what we do, but how we do everything and that absolutely comes into play in regard to our faith let alone our stewardship and what it may mean to us. What drives you? What is your why?

As we hear these words from Paul to his protégé Timothy, we are inundated with a variety of stewardship one-liners. They all carry varying levels of importance (you know, depending on the various levels of financial resource you have available, let alone the why that drives you in your use of those assets).

But when we get to the end of the passage, we are provided a reminder that should provide clarity for everyone: take hold of the life that really is life. Some people may immediately go to the space of relativity and declare, ‘what’s ‘life’ for you, is not necessarily ‘life’ for me.

That’s handy if you are unwilling to acknowledge even some of the standards of faithful living that are put forward in the midst of scripture...but if you do recognize that there are expectations as to what faithful living looks and feels like, then this reminder to take hold of the life that really is life begins to carry quite a bit more gravitational force.

What drives you? What’s your why? The scripture reads this way.

I Timothy 6:6-19

⁶Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; ⁸but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

11 But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. ¹⁶It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

17 As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, ¹⁹thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

“What’s Your Why”

We have made a few changes as a church over the last few years. From Sunday School, to worship time, to the number of members on Consistory, we have been willing to try some different things, and as the case may be, even change some of the changes.

One of the shifts that was made that most people really don’t even think about though is the shift that we have made in the fiscal calendar. What this means is that instead of our fiscal year ending on December 31st, it now ends on May 31st. There are a couple of reasons why this shift was made.

Yes, there was the fact that this new fiscal calendar more accurately reflects our program year of September through, roughly, June.

However, there is another reason that I resonated with in an even greater way. What rather large Christian holiday comes at the end of the calendar year? That’s right, Christmas. Christmas is important in so many ways, and unfortunately, one of those ways was to balance the church budget. I’m going to let you in on a little secret of all the churches I have been a part of: the operating budgets run into the negative into the summer and then try and climb out of the fiscal deficit through the fall before reaching that break even mark right around...Christmas.

I have no problem admitting that there were a few years when such a set up was not a positive for me. Why? Because there were too many days when my focus during the season of Advent was not only upon worship, but upon the weather forecast, which would affect attendance, which would be reflected in the offerings that were received. All of a sudden, the why of my worship leadership was divided, because I’m thinking about ‘making budget’ ...and that’s bad.

Thankfully, that really hasn’t been an issue here...but it was still floating around in the back of my head. So when the possibility of shifting the fiscal calendar came up a couple of years ago,...let’s just say, I supported it.

The reason that I bring this example up is because there are too many ways that too many communities of faith have proclaimed that what really drives them is receiving as many dollars as possible.

Now in churches of our size, that means that the community is trying to get close to breaking even.

But I know that there are other examples when those dollars end up being used in ways that end up leaving folks to wonder what the priority of the community really is.

In either case, the what (receiving of financial gifts) is being driven by a why that doesn't seem to come anywhere close to the statement that is at the end of the passage that we just read from: take hold of the life that is really life.

In the one case, you have communities that are trying (emphasis on the trying) to survive. In the other case, you have groups that seem to be building up for something other than reasons that are purely God driven. Neither is good. Neither is fully and completely God-breathed. Neither is taking hold of the life that is really life.

So what is this life that is really life? And how are we able to get closer to living it out so that we are able to be the good stewards, the good caretakers of our time, talent, and treasure?

There are a few lines which help to provide direction as to how we get closer to space. The first is that, 'we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it'. Clearly, humanity has been struggling with this idea for a long time (all around the world (Egypt and China just to mention two) there are examples of people who did their best to take what they had with them into the afterlife.

But it doesn't work that way. We started out this season of Lent with the reminder that from dust we came to dust we shall return. We can't take it with us...regardless of how much we may want to...despite the different ways that we try and create memorials so that our level of importance and influence are felt long after we are gone.

Now some people hear that they can't take it with them and that turns into a green light to burn through their resources, their time, talent, and treasure and which way they please.

Is anyone going to be surprised when I say that isn't the sort of life that we are called to? (I hope not!)

And I need look no further than a second quote which backs up this assertion that using your resources for your own glorification in alignment with taking hold of the life that is really life: 'pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith.' Taking hold of the life that is really life means living a life of service that utilizes the blessings that you have and putting them to use in a way that yes, meets your needs, but also addressing those areas that are beyond your own immediate circle of family and friends.

And that reality is emphasized when we then hear Paul say, 'As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future.' And mind you, the future that is being stored up is not a 401k but a walk with the Almighty that grows ever deeper with each season of life.

Again, what drives you? What's your why? Does God and His call to truly live by serving, by being a good steward of all that you have been blessed with, make the short list of guiding influences? Should He?

A quick glance at the headlines shows an incredible variety of 'why's'. Money, influence, power, revenge, pleasure, safety, leisure, victory, and popularity show up in a whole variety of ways and most of them can lead you in directions that might even feel somewhat rewarding for a period of time.

But do any of those 'why's' lead you to the life that is really life? Scripture says, 'no'. And if we are willing to be honest with ourselves, I think that each of us would be able to articulate a variety of personal experience that echoes what we hear in the scriptural account.

Maybe we actually need adhere to the Almighty as our 'why'. I wonder what our world would look like and feel like if more of us who purport to be people of faith actually lived with God as our 'why'? Would more people be cared for? Would depression, addiction, abuse, and violent crime rates begin to drop? Would more marriages be healthy? Would more children feel safe and loved? And then somewhere way down the list of importance, would more operating budgets be met?

I believe that answer is 'yes' because when people start to take hold of the life that is really life, the breath of God is able to flow into their lives and the world in ways that allow them to experience the blessing of God: not that the difficulties of life or the problems of the world disappear, but that we are empowered to face them in ways that allow the world around us to experience the presence of God.

And you know what? That sounds awfully good to me.

So I finish up with where I started: what drives you? What's your why? Take hold of a life that is really life. Love God. Love neighbor. Give as you are called to do, in all of the ways that you are able to do so...and you will begin to do that very thing.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy and gracious God, our why, those things that drive us, tend to have us heading off in a variety of directions...and a whole lot of those have little to nothing to do with You. Lord, lead us to take hold of the life that is truly life by loving You, our neighbor, and serving as the good stewards You have called us to be. Mold us and shape us so that who we are becoming becomes ever closer to who You created us to be. Lord, let it be so. Amen.