

"How Eternal Life Changes You"

John 17

I was tidying up my office desk this week and saw a magazine I hadn't looked at so I browsed through it and an article caught my eye. It was an article about a newly retired seminary professor and it gave his testimony in it. His name is Michael Williams and this is what was written:

It was down in the darkest nether regions of the North Atlantic Ocean, cloistered for a 70-day Navy submarine patrol in the claustrophobic confines of a titanium tube, when Michael Williams at last encountered a possible purpose for his heretofore drifting, aimless existence. 'I'd been sort of free-floating through life and when the submarine began its descent it occurred to me I could die down here! All it would take would be one crack, one rupture from a sea water pipe and that would be the end.

'And it hit me that if I did die, well, what difference would my life have made? Why am I even breathing? Why am I doing this? Nothing was making sense to me. The futility of living without any purpose or direction was crushing in on me. Where can I go for answers? What's the point? And right then, providentially, one of my crewmates held up a New Testament.

He had grown up in a nominal religious family but knew precious little about the Bible and even less of God's nature and the possibility of experiencing a deep relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus. As he read it, he devoured it and came to faith in Jesus. He wrote 'I found in the Bible's message, meaning and purpose and direction. I discovered that this is about a whole new life that's being offered in service to God.

He found life or eternal life as he read the Word of God. This is what is so crucial to understanding when we believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who took on flesh to die for our sins. Once we recognize our sinfulness and our need for a Saviour, we place our faith in Jesus who gives us "eternal life." This is where we started last week in our pursuit to try and understand what eternal life is. It's God's gift to us through Jesus that each must receive for themselves, resulting in forgiveness of sins and a new heart. God's Spirit comes in and breathes new life into us and we are 'reborn'.

And many of us have experienced what Michael Williams was explaining. This complete overhaul of the way we think about life. We come to realize that life has no direction or meaning apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Here in John 17, Jesus explains this through His prayer to His Father the night before He is about to die. In this prayer He thanks God for the ministry God gave Him in revealing God to the disciples primarily, who will continue Jesus' ministry when the Holy Spirit comes upon them.

What we glean from Jesus' prayer, as He summarizes His purpose in His time on earth, is a description of our same purpose while we live on earth. This is what eternal life does for us – it changes us. Eternal life is not a synonym for heaven. 'Eternal' is an adjective describing a quality of life, not simply a time reference. We have it now, so it must speak of something more than just our future abode with God. And here in John 17 Jesus tells us exactly what eternal life is and how it changes us – now – and forever.

³ *Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

That's a pretty clear definition of eternal life.

When We Have Eternal Life, We Know God Himself **(17:1-3)**

That word “know” means an intimate knowing, a relationship. We didn’t have this before we received Jesus and chose to follow Him. We were perishing because of our sin. But now that we asked forgiveness of our sins and received Jesus as our Saviour we now have,

An eternally binding relationship (vv.1-2)

Through faith in Jesus.

Does that ever boggle your mind that you actually know God? Not completely obviously – and we never will – but we do know who He is (the Only, Holy, all-powerful, loving God), who created the world we live in (including us), who patiently puts up with sin so that more people would respond to His grace and who wants to meet our needs and give us a purpose-filled and joy-filled life while on this earth and reward us fully in eternity with His presence.

If we know God, we know the answers to the big questions of life? Who am I? How did I get here? Why am I here? Where am I going? Notice however you can’t know God apart from believing in Jesus, His Son. To know God is to know Jesus and vice versa. That’s where religions fail. If Jesus is not the divine Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father through whom all things were made, then you cannot know God. A faulty or incomplete understanding of Jesus means you don’t know Him or His Father. And you can’t have eternal life. You miss out on what life means and where purpose comes from.

And we only get to know God by His mercy and grace

Because He loves us (v.3)

³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Why did God send Jesus? *“For God so loved the world that He gave His One and Only Son ...”*

The only reason we can even know God at all is because of His immense love for us that He wants us to know Him. He wants us to have a relationship with Him. Which also means He wants to spend all eternity with us, but for now He also wants us to be happy in Him and find purpose in being created.

Why do people even ask the big questions of life? Who am I? How did I get here? Why am I here? Where am I going? Because that’s how God created us with a need to know why we exist. In Ecc. 3:11 we read that God *“has set eternity in our hearts”*. Its in our DNA to discover who we are, who God is and why we exist.

So, Jesus says eternal life is to know God, to have a relationship with Him through Jesus Himself. Not surprisingly, Jesus then talks about His purpose and indirectly, ours. Once we know God, we have eternal life and ...

Now We Know Our Purpose in Life

(17:4-8)

In His prayer Jesus reveals His purpose and ours.

⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. ⁶ "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

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Jesus' mission or purpose in life is the same as ours:

To use our life to reveal God to others (vv.4a, 5)

"Jesus says I have glorified You on the earth" in v.4 and then in v.6 He adds "I have revealed You to those whom you gave me ...". Jesus' mission was to show God to those in His sphere of influence. Our mission is to reveal God to those in our sphere of influence. Why? Because we need to know God if we want to know who we are and why we're here. God's purpose for all of us is to glorify Him, to make life about Him, to reveal Him to those around us who don't know Him. Why is that our mission? Because God has promised in many places in the Old and New Testaments that He's going to fill the world with the knowledge of His glory. That's God's vision for the world and He will accomplish it and right now He's using us to accomplish His vision to fill our part of the world with the knowledge of His glory.

How do we do that?

Through the specific responsibilities He's given us (v.4b, 6)

It's easy to think that Jesus' mission was only to die on the cross but Jesus modelled a godly life and glorified God for 33 years, 30 of those years were in relative obscurity. Do you think Jesus had no purpose for the first 30 years of His life? He always had the purpose of revealing God to those God gave Him. Remember how his siblings didn't receive Him as Messiah? Eventually some of them did (James & Jude, his step-brothers).

When the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus, He began to tell people the gospel (which means joy-filled news) that the Kingdom of God was near. He spoke that to thousands of people in His sphere of influence in Judah and Galilee and to the Gentiles and the Romans. And He had the specific responsibility of dying on the cross for our sins.

Since God has made us, we all have unique abilities. When God saved us, His Spirit came upon us to enable us to do Spirit-led work of revealing God to others. Your purpose in life is to glorify God by revealing Him to those God has given to you (family, friends, co-workers, classmates, teammates, neighbours). If your talents lie with your hands or your mind and you might have many things you can do well in life that will guide your work career but that's not your purpose in life. Your purpose in life is to reveal God through the abilities and spiritual gifts He has given you.

So, your purpose never changes even though your career will change and your health will change and your sphere of influence will change. Whether your 10 years old or 30 or 70 or 100 your purpose is to reveal God to those whom He has given you (your sphere of influence) with the unique talents and spiritual gifts He has given you.

Okay, how?

By using His Word to explain Him (vv.7-8)

⁶ "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. [meaning Jesus used the Word to reveal God to them] ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the **words** you gave me and they accepted **them**. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. [because Jesus showed them from the Word].

But we just can't come up to people and tell them 'Thus says the Lord'. We have to live an obedient life that communicates we live for a different purpose than the world. Which will attract their attention. Why? Because they also have been made with a built-in hard drive that wants to know who am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose? And they see us as living a purposeful life with more joy than most. And they want to ask us 'How can I get that?' And we show them how through the Word.

So, even though we struggle at times as to know what career path to choose or what school to go to or who to marry or where to live, none of that changes our mission in life. They just become the geographical location and the means by which we accomplish God's purpose in life. And,

Our Purpose is Best Accomplished through Unity **(17:9-26)**

What does Jesus spend more time praying for the night before He dies than anything else? For His disciples then and all future disciples now to stay united and work together.

⁹ I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹ I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you.

Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

¹³ "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

²⁰ "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³ I in them and you in me— so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

²⁴ "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

25 "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

If Jesus prays for all believers (v. 20 'for those who will believe in Me' – that's us!) then we all need prayer. And we all need prayer to work together because our sinful nature always resists that. It's very subtle ('oh, I don't feel like going out to be with people tonight'; 'they have enough, they don't need me'; 'I'm tired after work, after school'; 'there people a lot more gifted than I that can help out'). And the list goes on; Satan's subtle lies to keep us from working together. When Jesus says He prays this for 'those who will believe in Him' I assume that since He always lives to intercede for us (Heb. 7:25) that this is ...

A unity that Jesus still prays for! (vv.9-12)

Jesus prays for our protection from the world's way of thinking and the evil One. He prays this by the power of God's name. Persecution, illness, depression and selfishness all tend towards disunity and separation. So, if Jesus is praying for this, we need to also.

Jesus prays for this because our relationship in God with each other is ...

A unity that brings us the most joy (vv.13-17)

Jesus desires for us to have the full measure of His joy in us. This joy is a relational joy that He enjoys with His father and now wants all of us to share together. This sanctifying (setting us apart together from the world) happens through the Word of God. The more we are in the Word of God individually the more we will see our need to be in the Word of God collectively. Studying God's Word is more fun in a group than it is by yourself at home. Isolation always leads towards self-righteousness and a Pharisaic attitude.

And, not surprisingly Jesus prays for our unity to remain strong because this is

A unity that helps us see God's glory more fully (vv.18-26)

Jesus prays for us to see the fullness of His glory with the Father in v.24 and yet He says in v.22 we already have His glory. We have the down payment of it because the Spirit dwells in us. When we experience fellowship with one another – the spiritual sharing and serving God's purposes together – we get a glimpse and taste of the divine relationship. So then why don't we experience it more? Because Satan keeps distract-ing us from being together. We're either too busy or too tired. And if we're not tired or too busy all of a sudden we get sick. Is that all of Satan? Probably not directly but he uses them to keep us apart from accomplishing God's mission of sharing His joy to fill the world with His glory. Why does Jesus pray for Satan's defeat here in the context of our need for spiritual unity? Because this is ...

A unity that helps others know God too (v.21, 23)

May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. - 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Disunity distracts and derails the gospel. And often we're not even aware we have fallen for the enemies' subtle strategies to keep us separated or reduced in numbers. You ever wonder why there are so many places God says don't get discouraged by lack of numbers? Three reasons: 1) The

greater the numbers the more we trust in ourselves and not God; 2) God doesn't need numbers to do big things, although He wants all His people to get on board; and 3) the reality is too many times we will only have small numbers for services, ministries and events and that can get discouraging. So God says, 'Yep, I know more could be involved but thank Me for who is here and I can do a lot with the obedient few.'

Knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior gives you eternal life. Eternal life is God's very presence residing with us now and staying with us for all eternity. In the mean time equipping us with natural abilities and spiritual enabling to reveal God to a world that's looking for meaning and purpose - and we have it! What's the best way you and I can be prepared to think this way as we go to school, work, play or just live with our neighbours? I think Jesus shows us right here. We need to pray each day that we would think eternally about how to reveal God to our spheres of influence through the unique ways God has individually made us.

Father, I pray for each one here to began their reminding themselves that their mission is to glorify You. To think of how through their attitude, actions and words how they will reveal You to those You have given them. Lord, may the way we live speak to the unsaved so that they will ask about our hope and joy and we will point them to Your Word. Keep us set apart for You and your joy through our time in Your Word individually and collectively.

Forgive us for the many times we have disobeyed You by not getting together with other believers. Forgive us for letting them down by not helping to serve but also thank You for those times when we did come and the numbers were few and we still saw You do great things through us.

Father, thank You that we have seen some here come to know You through our ministries and witness. Thank You for the joy-filled times we've had when we served and played together. Help us to experience more fully Your joy and glorious presence in us together until our life finally ends and we are with You or until Jesus returns and fills this world with the knowledge of Your glory.

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please contact us at olivvet@rideau.net