

## (1.25) Amending Life

Oftentimes I have thought of life as, *Sheer futility: everything is futile!*<sup>1</sup>

Reflect upon these words, which will fade away as you become watchful and diligent in serving God's will according to your status in life that always calls you to become a holy spiritual person.

Strive to make progress as time passes quickly and you will receive your reward for all your struggles and labors and reach the time and place where neither fear nor sorrow exist for there comes everlasting joy and peace. Be faithful in your works and fervent in prayer and *know that the LORD works wonders for his faithful one*<sup>2</sup> and is rich in rewarding. Seek the crown of life keeping secure hope without becoming proud or over confident.

There is the story of a person of great anxiety who often swung back and forth between hope and fear, and in despair fell upon his knees before an altar in church and with these thoughts swirling in his mind prayed: " Lord, if I only knew whether I should persevere in faithfulness!" And in his heart there was a heavenly response, "And if you knew, what would you do? Therefore do now what you would do and you will find security and contentment." Responding positively he vowed to follow the will of his heavenly Father, and his anxiousness immediately waned.

He was now guided by the words: *Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.*<sup>3</sup> *Trust in the LORD and do good that you may dwell in the land and live secure.*<sup>4</sup>

Fear of difficulty and stress of conflict can keep a person from spiritual progress and yet if you continue to conquer those aspects of life that you find difficult and contrary you will advance beyond expectations. Overcoming your worldly self and disciplining your spirit brings abundant graces. Keep in mind that we do not all have the same difficulties to conquer, but that a diligent and zealous person, even with heavy problems, will make greater progress than one who is less determined in pursuing virtues.

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<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:2

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 4:4a

<sup>3</sup> Romans 12:2

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 37:3

Several things are conducive in making positive strides; one is to be most discerning toward our natural worldly inclinations, conquering them, while the other is to discern the good that we need, and strive for it. We often find particular faults in others displeasing not realizing that we too have similar faults that need amending. Use all situations for spiritual advantage and when you see praiseworthy behavior be sure to imitate it, but make sure to avoid wrongful behavior and if you recognize similar behavior in yourself, make changes. You may be keen in scrutinizing the behavior of others but remember there are others who watch you in a similar fashion.

It is heartwarming to see brothers and sisters who are zealous and devoted, mannerly and disciplined. On the other hand it is troubling to see others undisciplined with a lifestyle contradicting their Christian calling and wasting time by turning their attention to things that do not concern them or are beyond them.

Keep the image of Christ crucified in your mind's eye and it will help keep you focused on your purpose in life. You may feel insignificant when comparing your life to that of Jesus Christ but ask of Him, as did the disciples: *Increase our faith!*<sup>5</sup> The spiritual person who often meditates upon Jesus' life and passion will be graced with all that is needed in life and need not look any further. *The Lord is good and forgiving, most merciful to all who call upon him*<sup>6</sup> and Jesus' coming into our hearts will furnish us with the guidance we require.



The zealous spiritual person takes to heart and bears well all that is required in life while the negligent person encounters continuing difficulties, constantly anguishing, since inner consolation is lacking and outward consolation cannot be found. A life not disciplined will eventually encounter frightful stumbling blocks. Recall the lesson of Jonah<sup>7</sup> who heard God's commandment and went off in an opposite direction only to have things go downhill and only after three days of despair and darkness did he respond with fervor when told the second time.

Imagine your joyfulness if there would be nothing else to do but to praise the Lord, our God, with our voices and with our whole heart, and we never needed to eat, drink, or sleep, but could spend all our time praising God while being concerned with only spiritual matters. But the body often reminds us that it has its necessities that must be dealt with.

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 17:5-6

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 86:5

<sup>7</sup> Jonah 3



When a person reaches a state that seeks no consolation from created things then the sweetness of God is experienced and contentment is there with whatever occurs. Such inner stillness neither brings rejoicing over big matters, nor sorrow over small ones, as there is complete and resolute trust in the heavenly Father who is in all things, who is the Creator of all things that serve Him with unwavering obedience.

Be cognizant of your end remembering that time quickly passes and you will not be able to improve in your virtues without constant care and discipline. If you begin to slack then evil creeps in but if you maintain dedication peace stays with you and your responsibilities will be less burdensome with God's graces and love. *At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.*<sup>8</sup>

Ardent and attentive persons can handle whatever comes their way and they recognize daily responsibilities are not as difficult as coping with their own shortcomings and temptations. Small faults are best corrected quickly as they can mount up to more serious ones.

Spend your day dutifully, seek God's will enthusiastically, admonish yourself when needed, neglect not your responsibilities even in the smallest ways, and evening will bring joy and peaceful rest for another productive day.

This article is based on Book 1, Chapter 25 of Thomas of Kempis' writing, "Imitation of Christ." It is not a translation, and there are many of those, but a personal (layperson's) reflection on his writing; if any of it helps give credit to Thomas of Kempis; if any of it fails the responsibility is mine. ( rfm)

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<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 12:11