

## Discovering the Life You've Always Wanted to Live

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April 28-29, 2001

"I Believe in the Church" Series

Ephesians 4:17-24

I've recently been rereading a fascinating book by Paul Johnson titled *Intellectuals*. Despite its daunting title, what Johnson does in the book is explore the personal lives of the philosophers and writers that university students study. Those writers and philosophers that purport to give us advice and counsel about the way we are to live. He looks at the personal lives of people that are often quoted and cited and whose philosophies are held up as models for the rest of humanity. The folks who all the would-be Ph.D. candidates write dissertations about and pore over their words trying to discover some secret hidden meaning in their thoughts that no one else has come up with before.

What Johnson does is not to look at these people's philosophies, but to examine their lives. His approach is "Well, let's see how this supposedly great and brilliant philosopher actually lived life." He writes about people like Rousseau, the 18<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher; Shelley, the early 19<sup>th</sup> century English poet; and Karl Marx, Tolstoy and Norman Mailer.

What you discover when you read Johnson's book is that all these folks who are studied and quoted and held up as paragons of humanity were, in fact, some of the most awful, despicable, mean, violent, promiscuous people that you could imagine. They uniformly were cruel to women, despite their women's liberation philosophies. They, almost to a man, had a very low view of women. They were horrible to their wives and, almost to a man, were wife beaters. They were violent, mean-spirited, often drunkards. Many of them were even personally dirty. They didn't bathe. They were the kind of folk who if you met them in a bus station, you would move your seat because you would look at them as dirty old men – seedy, dangerous, often perverted.

Let me mention just two of the characters that feature prominently in the book *Intellectuals*. By the way, the author, Paul Johnson, is a very careful historian. He has written major works on modern history, modern European history, and American history. This is not some lurid, *National Enquirer* kind of scandal sheet reporter. He writes an objective, dispassionate view of the personal lives of intellectuals. The two folks that I just want to briefly mention to you are Jean-Paul Sartre and Ernest Hemingway.

Sartre's writings were wildly popular on college campuses in the 1960s and 70s. He was the father of the philosophy called "existentialism," which according to Sartre, defines a person according to his actions. He tells a man or woman that

their only hope lies in action. So you make a commitment to do something, anything, and that's what gives your life meaning.

This philosophy was very attractive to the disillusioned post-war generation, who was grasping for meaning in life. Like most of the folks featured in Johnson's book, Sartre was a wonderful self-promoter. He got along famously with the press, who would fawn over him and quote him at length. He had great PR skills. He would talk endlessly about women's liberation and the equality of the sexes and the need for sexual freedom. In fact, the woman that he lived with for 15 years, Simone de Beauvoir, was one of the founders of modern feminism.

But despite all of this talk about feminism, he treated his live-in lover, Simone de Beauvoir, horribly. And she allowed herself to be treated horribly. He was notoriously promiscuous. He slept with his young college coeds. He slept with friends' wives. He was lewd and crude and drunk and violent.

His philosophy actually had disastrous consequences for millions of people. Eight Cambodians, who were studying in Paris, took classes from Sartre in which he taught them that life had no ultimate meaning or value. That if you needed to commit violence to achieve your vision of justice, then go ahead and commit violence because the end justified the means. These eight Cambodians listened to Sartre and they went back to Cambodia and killed a third of their countrymen. Ideas do have consequences.

Johnson also focuses upon the life of Ernest Hemingway, who was also a supreme egotist and a wonderful self-promoter. The press loved Hemingway and wrote about all of his exploits. He had this image of being a swaggering, macho man's man fighter. The problem with all of his supposed exploits was that none of them actually happened. Hemingway was one of the biggest liars in history. He wouldn't know the truth if it hit him over the head with a board.

He lied about his own family. He wrote in his autobiography that his sister had been raped when she was 12 and had been divorced many times. In fact, it was entirely a lie. His sister was happily married just once and had never been assaulted. He lied about his war time service in WWI and that he led a battalion at the age of 19. In fact, he was a non-combatant and never saw any military action whatsoever in WWI.

In spite of his reputation for being a man's man, he was notoriously accident-prone. He was completely un-athletic. He was what we would call today, something of a geek. The list of his injuries from falling downstairs and tripping off curbs and falling into holes and banging his head would keep an orthopedic surgeon financially secure for years.

He was violent, but mostly with women. He was profoundly abusive to his four wives. And Hemingway, though he thought of himself as politically savvy, was

an absolute dupe of Joseph Stalin. He would often ignorantly mouth the Soviet party-line regarding an event in Africa or most famously in the Spanish Civil War only to turn out dreadfully wrong.

And then there is Michael Foucault, whose philosophy of postmodernism is being studied and championed on many college campuses. But like the other intellectuals that Johnson writes about, Foucault was a tragic figure personally. He was a notoriously promiscuous homosexual, who also badly abused drugs and who died a terrible death from AIDS in the mid-1980s in San Francisco.

My point in mentioning this book and in selecting a few people, by way of illustration, is not that philosophy is bad or that literature is bad and, therefore, one should avoid it. But it is rather that most of the folks who purport to give you advice and counsel about how to live life are rather clueless about life themselves. A best selling female author who has written about various secrets that women need to know about men has herself been divorced five times. In fact, one of her marriages was to another best selling author who wrote about male/female relationships. One of the reviewers of this woman's book said on Amazon.com that people downgrade her for her five divorces, but the truth is without them and the other failed relationships that she candidly shares with us, she wouldn't have the knowledge to write the book. She is clearly a person who has learned from her mistakes. Well, perhaps, so. But it might be nice if she had a successful track record for just a little while before she publishes her newest thoughts about successful relationships.

Well, if you can't trust the philosophers and you can't trust many of the writers, not only of literature, but of the self-help books, how do you find the counsel, the advice for living a good life? One of the reasons that I am a pastor is because I am absolutely convinced that the counsel that you and I need to live a good life is contained in this book that I teach you every week – the Bible. Not in the philosophers, not in many of the great writers nor in many of the most popular self-help books, but in the Bible will you discover the life you have always wanted to live. That's what I've called today's talk, "Discovering the Life You've Always Wanted to Live." Let's invite the Lord's presence before we open up God's Word together.

*Ephesians 4:17-24 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely, you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful*

*desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Now, a lot of folks when they find out that the philosophers lived these terribly inconsistent lives say, "Well, I knew it. Who wants all of that high-falutin' philosophy anyway? Just give me something practical. Just tell me how to live life." And if you look over many of the sermons of the most popular Christian speakers, you will have sermon titles like "Five Ways to Improve Your Marriage" or "Four Keys to Better Communication." That's the stuff that sells, practical stuff, books like "A Thousand Ways to Say I Love You." You know, those little books that sit by the cash registers at Barnes and Nobel or Borders. The impulse item books. Have you ever looked through one of those? Down around the 200<sup>th</sup> way to say "I love you," you know the author is hurting. They are really struggling to come up with good stuff: name an asteroid after your lover.

There I am sitting on the grass with my wife, Marlene, and I say, "Darling, I have a surprise for you. Somewhere between Mars and Jupiter, there is a 14,000 ton piece of rock and ice that has your name on it. Whenever people look through a telescope, they are going to see that massive piece of rock and they are going to say, 'There's Marlene' all because I love you."

Folks want something practical. Tell me how to do my marriage and how to have a great relationship. Many people are frustrated when they turn to the Bible. They say, "This doesn't read like "A Thousand Ways to Say I Love You" or "Five Ways to Improve Your Marriage" or "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People." This book doesn't read like that. It is filled with lots of lengthy descriptions about God and about the world and about people. I want something practical. Not all this talk about God, the world and people."

The Bible writers know something. They understand that without a solid foundation in the truth, there is no hope for living a good life. Oh, you can give someone four tips for doing this or six ways to do that and life will improve for a little while. But a few months later, they will be just as miserable and unhappy as they ever were, right back to square one. There is nothing more practical than getting down to what you believe about people, about God, about the world. Ideas have consequences.

And so in discovering the life that you always wanted to live, before we get to the how, the practices, we need to explore the way, the truth and doctrine that underlines our condition in the world. Why are we so unhappy? Why are there so many divorces? Why are we so violent and hypocritical and so lacking in satisfaction? The philosophers are clueless and so many of the writers are clueless. But here is what the Bible teaches about the fundamental cause of our unhappiness. The apostle Paul writes: *So I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of*

*God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more.*

Paul is describing, first of all, life in this world without Christ. What is it like to live without Christ? Without God? And he gives us a devastating description of life in this world without Christ.

It is a life of futile thinking, verse 17, of darkened understanding, verse 18. Without Christ, we are separated from the life of God, we are ignorant, our hearts are hardened. And in this darkened, ignorant, callous, empty way of life, we always find ourselves groping for satisfaction and groping for fulfillment, but never finding it.

A married couple comes to a counselor. They each have their list of complaints that have accumulated over the years. He doesn't communicate. He is insensitive. He is not responsive to her feelings. He is cold and controlling and verbally abusive. She is frigid. She is a nag. She doesn't like to do anything that's fun. She holds grudges and keeps throwing the past up in his face. They can never just get on with life. Back and forth they hurl complaints.

What does the counselor say? What is the counselor to do to sort out this mess of a marriage?

The apostle Paul says here are two people who first need to understand what their position in this world is without Christ. That the fundamental problem they have is that there is a Christ-sized hole in their marriage. That any practical counsel that I give them will ultimately fail because they are living without Christ.

That's what Paul is getting at here. He is saying that if you want to heal the disease, if you want to understand the reason why men and women are so miserable, why life never works out, you must get down the root, not just put a band-aid on the cancer, but get down to the root. And the root is life without Christ; Paul never tires of analyzing life without Christ. In this letter, we saw it in Ephesians 2:1, *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us lived among them at one time gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.*

There is a description of life without Christ. And in Eph. 2:12, *Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.* Outsiders, hopeless, disobedient, living according to a way grooved out by the enemy.

And now Paul gives us another description of life without Christ. What is it? He says it is life lived with futile thinking. The word “futile” could be translated vain or empty. That all of our thoughts just lead to emptiness and nothingness. This is an explanation not just of life in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, but life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – emptiness characterizes so much of life.

You look at all of these government proposals for fixing education. We recognize that something is desperately wrong in our schools. The kids don't know what they need to know. What's the answer? The answers often offered by government are empty. The principals and school teachers know that simply having state-mandated tests every single year won't lead to a quality education. That all the curriculum will soon be directed toward the test.

There is an emptiness and futility in so many well-intentioned programs designed to reform people's behavior. Well, we will go into schools and we will teach abstinence. We will have police officers come in and talk about drug abuse. We will put on programs on improving self-esteem. And when the hard statistics come out, we discover that teenage sexual activity continues unabated, as does drug use. And the suicide rate is creeping up.

Paul is talking about thinking that leads nowhere. When we try to sum up the counsel, it doesn't amount to anything.

What is the basic world view of men and women outside of Christ concerning history and life? The basic world view is that things just go round and round. That there is no point and history just repeats itself over and over again. We are never ultimately going to arrive at anything, not only in the view of life, but in the view of death. You want to see emptiness? Life that just ends with a dull thud? Go to the funeral of someone who dies outside of Christ.

Paul goes on and says that outside of Christ, people are darkened in their understanding. The picture is that of a mist, a fog, which is over people's minds. There is nothing wrong with their brain power or their IQ, but there is this fog, this mist, that is over the mind.

A few years ago my family had an opportunity to go to Scotland and we visited the famous Edinburgh Castle, where Mary Queen of Scots lost her life. Unfortunately, it was one of those foggy, Scottish days and when we got to the castle and walked up the royal mile, you literally could not see the castle at all. You couldn't see a thing. It was quite exciting.

And this is a description of life without Christ. There is a mist, a fog, lying over people's minds so that even though they have high IQs, even though they may be very articulate, they can't see the truth.

I am finishing up a biography of Adolph Hitler by a fellow named Ian Kershaw. One of the things that I've discovered in reading his biography is how supportive the intellectuals were of Hitler's rise to power. The myth is that Hitler swayed the ignorant masses in Germany, but the intellectuals, the brilliant musicians and poets and artists and philosophers, they were staunch opponents of Hitler's rise. Nothing could be further from the truth. The most famous German philosopher during the 30s was a man named Martin Heidegger. He fell all over himself praising Hitler and he wrote a manifesto that he had other German professors sign, declaring their allegiance to Hitler and the National Socialist State. He said, "Hitler has changed our entire existence." There was mist over his mind. Yes, Hitler changed your existence, but not in the way you think.

On one particularly notorious night, Hitler and his thugs rounded up several hundred political opponents, newspaper men, businessmen, heads of other political parties, and in cold blood murdered them. Many of them were just shot in the head at point blank range. The minister of justice wrote a long defense of Hitler's heroic activity in saving Germany and of why violence was sometimes necessary.

You can be brilliant. You can be a Jean-Paul Sartre or write like a Hemingway or Norman Mailer or a Tolstoy and still not get it. There is a fog over the mind. And this tells us that there is no hope for people unless a powerful wind comes, the wind of the Holy Spirit, and blows the fog away. There is no hope for grasping the truth about themselves, the world or God or that they are separated from the life of God.

The New Testament has two Greek words for life. One is "bios." By *bios* we are talking about biological life, brainwave activity – if your heart beats, you are breathing. But there is a second Greek word for life, "zoe." And *zoe* is often used of spiritual life, the coming to life of a person's spirit so that they awaken to a relationship with God. The New Testament teaches you can have *bios*, biological life, without having *zoe*, spiritual life. See, the Bible is teaching that the issue of living a good life is not morals, it is not ethics, although it is important to be moral and ethical. But the issue is life. That people don't possess a quality in them that they need to live a good life. They don't have the life of God, the life of the Spirit, eternal life in them.

When you realize what a person's condition is, then you know that what you need to do is drop to your knees and pray for your husband, child, parents, coworkers or dear friends in your classroom who is miserable. The reason for their misery is that they are cut off from true life. Yes, they have a sense inside, a gnawing sense, that there should be more and they are groping for more, but they are like severed hands cut away from the source of life.

And some of you today are separated from the life that is in God. What is the cause of futile thinking and darkened understanding and alienation from the life of God?

It says the cause is *the ignorance that is in us due to the hardening of our hearts*. Again, the issue is not IQ. When Paul roots things in ignorance, he is talking about spiritual ignorance, ignorance of God. Ignorance of his plan and purpose in the world. Talk with bright, educated people, who have medical degrees and law degrees and you can say about such people that they are ignorant. They are ignorant of God, of what God is like. They don't know anything about the mercy of God or the grace of God or God's holiness or his ultimate commitment to drive sin out of this universe. They don't know anything about God's plan or purpose for life.

The root of this ignorance, Paul says, is the hardening of their hearts. This word "hardening" is an interesting one in Greek. It is "porosis." It is used to describe a kind of rock that is harder than marble. Paul traces our problems, ultimately, down to hearts that are harder than marble. Medical doctors in Paul's day used to use this word *porosis* to describe calcium build-up in people's joints. There were calluses. The Bible frequently describes the heart of a person who is outside of Christ as being hard. Jesus calls it stony ground. A heart that the seed of the Word of God can't enter and penetrate.

The Bible teaches that sin makes the heart hard. Persistent disobedience, violating your conscience over and over again will cause a callus to build up on your heart so that you become increasingly insensitive to the voice of God or the demands of conscience.

All of us have experienced this, have we not? The first time you sin in a certain area, you feel tremendous shame and grief. You are torn up about it. You feel awful and you resolve never to do that thing again. But if you persist, and commit that sin again and again and again, pretty soon the voice of conscience is turned off and a callus grows over your heart. You don't feel bad about what you are doing. Have we not all experienced this – the hardening of our hearts through persistent disobedience to God and his Word?

Folks will often say to me regarding this or that sin, "Well, honestly, I just don't feel bad about it" as if our feelings are a reliable judge concerning what God's intention is for life. Of course, you don't feel bad about it because your heart is harder than marble, because a callus has grown over it through repeated persistent violations of your conscience.

Jeremiah talks about a particularly low point in Israelite history. He says three times in the early chapters of Jeremiah, "The people of God no longer know how to blush." There is something wonderful about the ability to blush, to feel shame,

to feel embarrassment. It means your heart is alive. If you can sin unashamedly, no blushing, no guilt, something inside of you has died.

Friends, I tell you there is an increasing hardness, there is a coarsening in American culture. Not too long ago I was sitting at a Starbucks reading and I was listening in on a conversation of 8 teenagers from Westerville High School. There were five boys and three girls, who were obviously suburban kids dressed in all of the best that urban outfitters could supply to suburban kids. They were all laughing and having a great time. One thing that struck me about these nice suburban kids was how coarse they were, how callused in their conversation. The boys used the f-word in virtually every sentence in speaking to each other and in speaking to the girls without a second thought. The girls used it as well, although, a little less frequently. But I was listening to a girl talking with all of these guys about how hot another boy was. She went on to describe him at length.

My people have lost the capacity to blush, Jeremiah complains.

Again, we see the issue is not morals, not abstinence education. We need a change. We need something inside. The Bible says, regarding our hearts, that we need a new heart. That stony, hard, callused heart needs to be taken out of us and we need a new heart put in – a heart of flesh, a heart that is soft.

The result of life without Christ is mentioned in verse 19, *Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality, so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more.* I won't drag us through the mud of our culture regarding sensuality or the noticeable increase of demand for ever more sensual and violent kinds of entertainment. But out of this emptiness of life and darkened understanding, separated from the life of Christ, out of this callousness, we do see verse 19 played out – a drivenness for more and more and more of anything to fill the hole that is there in a life without Christ.

There is a phrase that is increasing being used around America these days. It is called web-widows or Cyber-widows. It is used to describe women whose husbands are addicted to the net. They call it net-addiction. Cyber affairs are becoming more and more common. And there are all these articles being written about how to discover if your mate is having a cyber affair. They are up late at night on the computer. They demand their privacy. They become highly incensed when you ask them to get off the computer. Or when you suddenly show up, they are secretive. What a person may do when they come home is check their email. There are all kinds of online addictions right now. There is actually therapy for people who are addicted to E-bay – the online auction site. Someone has actually written a 12-step recovery program for E-bay addiction.

I was in a gas station not too long ago and saw a woman who was anxiously scratching off all the instant lotto tickets. She probably had \$150 worth lined up

on the counter. She had a quarter out and was just scratching down these lotto tickets. She ran through \$150 worth of lottery tickets in a minute. I watched her in utter fascination and then said to her, "Does your husband know that you are doing this?" She looked at me and the color drained from her face. She said, "No, and he better not find out."

Life without Christ is groping for some satisfaction with an ever-increasing lust for more. Verse 20 is the turning point. *You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely, you heard of him and were taught of him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.* Here is the great contrast, here is the biblical answer for the misery, for the emptiness, for the groping and dissatisfaction that people feel with life. The answer is not that you need to become more moral. Paul does not give us a moral code or ethical code. He doesn't say to the empty darkened hard person, "We need an improved version of you." Like the new and improved Tide. He said, "What you've been missing, what is your only hope, is coming to know Christ. It is hearing of him, being taught about him and learning and living in the truth that is found in Jesus."

Let me tell you a story. I was invited recently to a meeting at the Ohio Secretary of State's office along with some other pastors in the city to discuss the dismal state of ethics in American culture today. This question was posed to these pastors: "What fundamentally would you have to teach people to raise the ethical water level in society?" Different pastors talked about the need to teach truth telling and sexual ethics and keeping commitments and vows. About 12 different pastors spoke and then it came to me and I said, "You know, I taught business ethics at OSU years ago and I've watched these blue ribbon panels put together their 23 recommendations for ethical behavior by corporations or politicians. I have no confidence that anything will make an ultimate difference in a person's life other than them coming to Christ. Without Christ at the center, without a person finding Christ, I have almost no hope that they will live a good life."

The apostle Paul is drawing an absolute contrast between the Christian and the non-Christian, between having Christ and not having Christ. And the loss of this contrast, the loss of the distinctiveness of the Christian life is, perhaps, the single greatest impediment to the advance of the gospel in the world today. Contrast, of course, is not that Christians are weird in their behavior or eccentric, deliberately annoying. A lot of Christians believe that they are persecuted for the cause of Christ. The truth is, that many Christians are just annoying little pests, critical, self-righteous, smug. It is not the kind of contrast that Paul was describing. He is describing a contrast of darkness and light, a contrast of having a hard heart and having a soft heart, of having mist over your mind and having the mist blown away. Of being separated from the life of God and then having the life of God.

And you know, we need to reemphasize the absolute contrast between not being a Christian and being a Christian if there is to be any hope for our friends or

family to come to Christ. It is a lie that people are most effectively reached when you are just one of them – when you drink with them, curse with them and laugh at their jokes. It is a lie that people are most effectively reached when the contrast between dark and light is minimized. A non-Christian expects a Christian to be different and is often disappointed and will speak his disapproval that the Christian is no different. Why should I get involved in what you are offering? It didn't produce change in your life. It is just another empty philosophy to be added along with the philosophy of Sartre, Hemingway and Rousseau.

I'll tell you what put a hook in my life. All the things that Paul described as life without Christ as being, that's who I was. My conscience was dead, callused. I didn't feel shame over what I was doing. My understanding was darkened. I was separated from the life of Christ. What put a hook in me was seeing the absolute contrast between Marlene, who was sharing with me Christ, and my life. The fact that she did not give ground to my sexual advances. I have often said to her, "Marlene, I think that if you had given ground, I think that if you had dated me, I think if you didn't draw such a clear line, I wouldn't be in Christ or I would have had to wait for someone else."

Friend, if you are giving ground, if you are a Christian who is living in a compromised way with a non-Christian, you need to go to that person and apologize to them for your betrayal of who you are. You need to ask their forgiveness for keeping them from coming to Christ. If you are dating someone out side the faith or if you have been a poor wife or husband to someone outside the faith, or a rebellious child, or a poor parent, you need to go to that person and say to them, "I am so sorry for hindering your ability to come to Christ. I have absolutely been hypocritical with you. I have claimed to be a follower of Christ, but my actions, speech, the way I've related to you hasn't shown you at all what Christ can do in someone's life. I am sorry. Will you forgive me?"

Non-Christians should feel a contrast when they are around you and you should feel a contrast. It is difference, not likeness, which draws people to Christ. Paul describes that difference as the putting off and putting on of garments. Verses 22-24, *You were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

The apostle Paul was talking about putting off our old self and putting on a new self. You must have seen on Oprah Winfrey or Rosie O'Donnell, these women who come on who look frumpy, their makeup is all wrong, or they aren't wearing any makeup. They have on all the wrong colors and baggy clothes. They have this makeover expert to show you cutting the woman's hair and curling it and putting on makeup and putting her in all new clothes. They show you the contrast – here's what she looked like before and now here she is. She walks out

confidently; she is a whole new person. She has a whole new attitude. The audience claps – new clothing resulted in a whole new person.

Paul is saying something very similar here. But not new clothing for your body, new clothing for your spirit, for your inner person. You take off the garment of the old person that is characterized by corruption. In other words, the one that is tending toward decay and emptiness and is deceitful. In other words, it keeps holding out false promises, “Well, if you just have one more relationship, one more experience. If you just purchase one more thing for your home....Or if you play the video game just a bit longer...or if you get a new boyfriend...” Paul says this old way of life, a way of life characterized by decay and deceit, that is moving in the way of destruction, needs to be put off.

In future weeks, we are going to talk about the how. I will just mention it briefly here, but remember that he is talking to Christians. He is not giving a reform plan for someone who does not have a new heart put in them. This business of putting off and putting on is not for the person who has a mist over their minds and a callused conscience or is separated from the life of God. Putting off and putting on is something that only can be accomplished in Christ through the strength of Christ, by the motivation of Christ.

How do you do it? You are struggling with a habit that has you defeated over and over again. You feel like you are living inconsistently, hypocritically. You’ve compromised. You don’t want to live like the person in verses 17-19, the person who is outside of Christ. You want to live like a person who has learned Christ. How do you do that?

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who was a heart surgeon, a cardiologist in England before he became a spiritual heart surgeon and famous preacher at Westminster Chapel in London, said, “The error that most people make in trying to put off the old person is that they pray when they should act.” If you are struggling with a habit, people say, “I’ll just pray about it.” A person goes into a counselor and the person describes this addictive cycle, this problem they have with their anger, their jealousy, or their shopping or lust. The counselor says, “Have you prayed about it?”

“Oh, yes, a thousand times. I’ve asked God to take it from me a thousand times and he hasn’t.”

Martyn Lloyd-Jones very astutely said the problem with most folks in putting off the old self is that they pray when they should act. Paul doesn’t say pray that your old self would be put off. He doesn’t say pray that God would take your old self from you. He says you were taught to put it off.

How do you put off the old self? Well, right from the beginning when the enemy comes to speak to you, don’t engage him. Wouldn’t it be nice if you went down

to the store and looked around? Don't argue with him. No, it wouldn't be a good idea. I've fallen for that before. No, I am not going to buy that lottery ticket. No, I am not going to drive through that part of town. No, I am not going to pick up the phone and call that person. It drags me down. Don't engage him.

Instead, run through verses 17-19. Here's what life is like when we live it apart from Christ. It is empty. It is dark. My heart gets harder and harder. I get duller and duller to the voice of God. This is what my life is like when I listen to the voice of the enemy. Don't engage the devil. Look at what your life is like apart from Christ. Don't feed your flesh in any way. Don't give any ground. Well, I won't buy anything, but I will just flip through the catalog. Don't lead yourself into temptation. Be utterly done with that way of life.

And instead, put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. All the things that you don't do with the old self, you do do with the new self. Don't engage the enemy, but you do engage God. You open your heart to God. You invite God's presence in in the morning. You say to God, "I want to hear your voice today and respond to you." You don't feed the old self, but you do feed the new self with the food of God's Word, with fellowship of God's people who can support your Christian life, by worshipping God, by reading Christian books, by listening to Christian worship music. Feed the new self with everything that is righteous and holy.

How do you discover the life that you have always wanted? You find the life you've always wanted in Christ. Not through self-improvement, not through a morals or ethics program, not through the empty philosophies of those who claim to have answers, but through this transformation, the placing into your being a new heart, a new spirit that you feed, nourish and nurture. Let's pray.

## **Discovering the Life You've Always Wanted to Live**

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Rich Nathan

April 28-29, 2001

"I Believe in the Church" Series

Ephesians 4:17-24

### **I. Life According to the Philosophers**

### **II. Life Without Christ (Eph. 4:17-19)**

- A. Empty Thinking (Eph. 4:17)
- B. Darkened Understanding (Eph. 4:18)
- C. Separated from God (Eph. 4:18)
- D. Ignorant and Hard-Hearted (Eph. 4:18)
- E. Pursuing Lusts (Eph. 4:19)

### **III. Life With Christ (Eph. 4:20-24)**

- A. The Different Life (Eph. 4:20-21)
- B. The Changed Life (Eph. 4:22-24)
  - 1. Putting Off
  - 2. Putting On