

Remembering What Matters Most

Introduction:



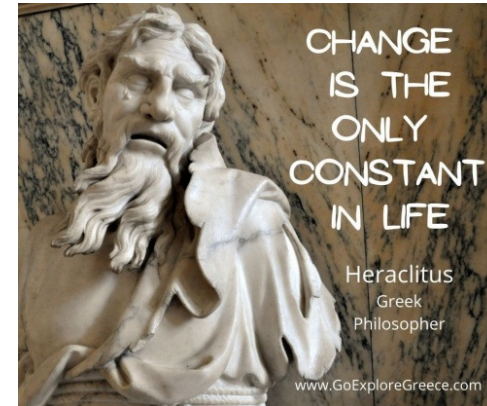
This photo pretty well sums up my 2023 highlight – I was promoted to be a “Gung-gung” (grandfather) and I love every minute of it - the birth of Savannah brings much joy into the Lau and the Seto families; it’s delightful and fun to see her sleeping and eating well, growing and smiling lots - thriving!!

How’s your year been? Has it been a good, or so-so, or bad, or terrible year?

What are the criteria do you use to evaluate whether 2023 was a good or bad, successful or failure year for you?

In 2024 should we aim to repeat whatever we consider good or to avoid what’s bad?

The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, once said that “No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man.”



As Jesus-followers our goal is to pursue what matters most in light of eternity.

So let us remind ourselves some basics of our faith, and the first and foremost criterion for a God-honouring life in 2024 is this:

Live on Purpose, God’s Purpose.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Rom. 8:28 NIV)

Often this passage is understood to be saying that all the disparate, chaotic, confusing, and painful happenings in life will eventually work out well for our benefit. This is partly true.

However, in his most recent book on Rom. 8, *Into The Heart of Romans*, N.T. Wright has clearly explained the underlying message of this verse (“in all things God works for the good”):

God is collaborating with (συνεργέω – to synergize/synergy - to work together with) those who love him, creating a family of Messiah-shaped people, to work out His purposes.

The vocation of God’s people as Jesus-like image bearers is to implement His purposes for the benefit of the wider world – God works with and through those who love Him “to be the means of bringing God’s rescue operation to humans and to the whole creation.”¹

So the fundamental truth that guides our daily living is this: life is not about us getting the outcome we want but God working out His will with us in and through whatever circumstances.

Dan Baker, co-author of one of the best sellers *What Happy People Know*, mentions five things that people think will bring happiness:

A Life of Leisure
Possessions
Worldly Power
Status
Financial Security

We work to survive ... but then we find that the things we do to survive are the things that end up killing us.
Dan Baker

What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for? (Mk. 8:36-37, *The Message*)

I will be turning 65 in a couple of months and this gets me to reflect on those times when I considered trading my soul for something else, especially when the going gets tough. I would be lying, if I say I never wish I were not a pastor. But I remind myself the “WHY” for what I am doing, i.e., my mission statement I crafted awhile back:

My mission is to empower diverse peoples to break down walls of separation and to steward their God-given abilities and resources for kingdom advance.

The application is clear: God and people are not here to serve *our* purpose; but we are called to infuse *God’s* purpose in everything we do!

It’s easy to confuse a lot of activity with a purposeful life.
Bob Goff

¹ N.T. Wright, *Into the Heart of Romans*, p. 165. For a detail exposition of Rom. 8:28-30, see pp. 155-175.

“So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” (1 Cor. 10:31 NLT)

And this leads us to the second criterion for a God-honouring life in 2024:

Enrich our relationships with God and others.

“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.” (Matt. 22:37-40 NLT)

Regarding His messages and instructions we find in the four Gospels, Jesus didn't give any instructions about how to accumulate wealth, how to make a name for self, or how to become powerful.

In the economy of God's kingdom all these matters – fame and fortune, prestige and power - pale into insignificance and become nonessentials.

What Jesus teaches in this passage is this:

The most valued and lasting matter in this life which spills over to the next life is our relationship with God and people, nothing else matters as much.

The bible teaches that we are relational creatures wired for interpersonal relationships. Our experience and passion of God's love shapes our interpersonal relationships.

Success, by Christ's definition then, is success in growing and lasting relationships.

What makes relationships work is nothing other than *love*, and the bible says we love because He first loved us!

In his award winning book, *The Love That Is God: An Invitation to Christian Faith*, theologian/professor Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt writes that the very fact of our existence is based on God's benevolence in creating us out of nothingness and that we are free from the fear that He doesn't love us:

“If ... what it means for us to love someone or something is to say ‘I am glad you exist,’ then what it means for God to love us is for God to say, ‘Because I am glad, you exist’ ... the perfect love that God is must be not simply interpersonal but overflowing.”²

The currency of God's kingdom is not gold, silver, or wealth - it's LOVE.

² Bauerschmidt, Frederick Christian. *The Love That Is God: An Invitation to Christian Faith* (p. 26, 27, 32). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Kindle Edition.

How much love do you have and are you willing to invest in this account and how much are you going to spend to sustain growth in this economy?

If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing. (1 Cor. 13:1-3 NLT)

The point is clear:

Eloquence – great skills & ability;

spiritual insight, wisdom as well as supernatural power;

confidence and certainty in God's power;

being resourceful and merciful;

modeling personal sacrifice and suffering for a worthy cause,

but have not love, *I gain nothing.*

The bottom line is *not proficiency, productivity, and profitability*; it is rather *the kind of person I am and the relationships I have built over time!*

Let us then assess the key relationships in our life: God, family, friends, non-Christians. Where are we at in each of these relationships?

Loneliness experts Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary found that “generally loneliness seems to be a matter more of a lack of intimate connections than of a lack of social contact.”³

From the little toddler who throws a temper tantrum, to the school boy who shot his schoolmates, to the teenager who left home, to the young adult who committed suicide, to the spouse who had extra marital affairs, to the elderly parent who couldn't wait for the children to visit, *everyone is starving for attention – TIME!!*

Personal significance is felt in how we invest our time in each relationship.

God wants us to spend our time wisely – make the most of every opportunity to do that which is important.⁴

³ Cited by Susan Mettes, *The Loneliness Epidemic: Why So Many of Us Feel Alone--and How Leaders Can Respond*, p. 34.

⁴ The apostle Paul admonished the early believers in Ephesus with the following words: So watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get ... Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants. (Eph. 5:15-17 *The Message*)

***Gift of Time = Expression of Love = Affirmation of
Personal Significance = Bringing Out the Best in Others!***

A few practical suggestions:

***(a) Take a daily 30 mins. fast from social media
and spend the time to enrich significant
relationships.***

***(b) Make regular visits with people in your circles
of influence.***

***(c) Pray for opportunities to show God's
unconditional love.***

Conclusion:

