

Would You Benefit from a “Life Verse”?

Several years ago I began a practice of asking God for a “word” for each calendar year to guide me in my spiritual formation during that year. Over the years there have been a variety – humility, courage, voice, etc. I would often in the course of the year be led to several verses related to that word, i.e. for “voice” I was impacted by John 10 (“my sheep know my voice”) and Revelation 3:20 (“if anyone hears my voice”).

One year a verse spoke to me so powerfully that I continued to meditate on it. That verse continued to speak powerfully to me not only throughout that year, but into the next and the next...until it has become a “life verse” for me. That verse? John 17:4 – “I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.”

These are the words of Jesus from what we call His “High Priestly” prayer (John 17) and they were offered by Him shortly before His death and resurrection. They speak to me because:

They are the words of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Now, I don’t believe the red letters (words of Jesus) are any more inspired than the rest of Scripture, but since I desire to be Christ-like I am particularly impacted by them. These words were ultimately fulfilled in the life of Jesus who was fully obedient even to death on the cross, but my hope and prayer is that they will be at least partially, and I’m even praying substantially, true of my life.

These words are offered shortly before His work time on earth was up. I live by the principle “begin with the end in mind” – these verses reflect the end Jesus had in mind.

The verse connects with my “activist” sacred pathway (see Sacred Pathways by Gary Thomas). While I am thankful for a rich devotional life, often connect deeply with God through public worship, and am moved by His glory in creation, my greatest moments of intimacy with God come through activity – when I hear His voice and join Him in something that He is doing in this world.

As I’ve reflected on this life verse over many years now, three questions have arisen that I regularly ask myself. This has been very formative in my spiritual life because God has shaped me as much through the questions I believe He has asked me as the answers I believe He has given me.

Who gets the glory? “I have brought you glory on earth...”

God moves decisively to counter “glory grabbers” (see Daniel 4 for an example). I never want to grab for God’s glory – pride does come before the fall, and God humbles those who exalt themselves. Plus, I’m intrigued that I can bring God glory on earth – not some other worldly experience for someday in heaven, but I can glorify God in everyday life.

Who sets the finish line? “...by finishing the work...”

Everything Jesus was to do was reaching completion – soon He would say from the cross “It is finished.” God determines when my work is done.

Who gives the assignment? “...the work you gave me to do.”

YOU gave me – God is sovereign in giving assignments. I must avoid comparison, and focus on the part He has given me to play.

A life verse isn't a "magic formula" – and it may end up being a "seasonal verse" that we should not feel compelled to stretch out for our whole lives. But would a life verse benefit you? What might that verse be?

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