

Laying Hold of Life

Think about the way we use the word, "Life."

Sometimes we use it to...

- differentiate between a living and breathing being and something that isn't
- describe fulfillment as in..

"This is the life! I feel so alive! I am living the dream!"

Phrases like... "YOLO" or "Carpe Diem"

Paul is going to encourage us at the close of his letter to Timothy that we should seize more than the day. We should seize life. We have to seize life because the great tragedy in life is not that one day we will all quit breathing but that some people will never truly live while they are breathing.

Paul doesn't want us to mistake existing for living.

And the Gospel isn't meant to take away our fear of dying. It is meant to take away our deeper fear that we might die and never have experienced life... life in the way God intended us to have.

1 Timothy 6:11-20: *"¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴ to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. ¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. ²⁰ Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, ²¹ which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith. Grace be with you all.*

Note: Paul encourages us twice in this passage to take hold of life.

- Take hold of eternal life. (v 12)
- Take hold of life that is truly life. (v 19)

This is Garden imagery. Paul has already used the Creation story earlier in this letter in 1 Tim 2 relating to the creation order of Adam and Eve. He is going to use it again.

There was a day in the Garden God breathed life into human-kind.

- Created as Image Bearers with the purpose to partner with God in establishing His reign over the Earth.
- Created us for communion- with the physical world, each other, and Himself. They walked with God in the beauty of a Garden.

God warned them that disobedience would lead to death.

"On the day that you eat...you will die." (Genesis 2:17)
(literal Hebrew- "dying you shall die.")

And what did Adam and Eve do... instead of grasping onto Life they grabbed hold of the thing that God had promised them would be death. They were convinced that God was withholding life from them.

Imagine all the goodness in the Garden... remnants that exist to this day.
The smell of flowers, the blowing breeze, the touch of skin, sunrises and sunsets... these are all good gifts given to us by God. *You can trust that "every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of Lights"*
(James 1:17)

But all of that goodness was not enough for Adam and Eve. God was not enough. They were convinced their lives would be better with more.

So they "took hold" of the fruit.
They ate.
But did they die?
"Not biologically-Relationally, Vocationally, Spiritually."
Humanity didn't stop breathing. Humanity stopped living.

Death robbed them of ...

- Their vocation
 - Their intimacy with God
 - Their relationship with the created world
 - Work became a toil
 - Childbearing became problematicThe Creation that they were meant to co-rule with God rebelled against them just as they had rebelled against God.
- But the Garden carries an echo in every soul.
- Human history is the story of humanity trying to get back to the Garden.
 - It is the story of grasping at things that promise life.
 - It is the story of our willingness to substitute a life of purpose for more power and pleasure.

Note: In the midst of history Jesus enters. He came not simply to take us to Heaven. He came to give us life-real life in the here and now and in the here-after.

Jesus said, **"I have come that you might have life and have it to the full."** John 10:10b
He did not say, "I have come so that you can go to Heaven when you die."

Jesus said, **"I am the resurrection and the life, the one who believes in Me will live even if they die and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."** (John 11:25)
He did not say, "the one who believes in Me will die and live with Me in Heaven."

Jesus said, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life."** (John 14:6)
He did not say, "I offer you a way to find a good place in the after-life."

Jesus came to give us life- life defined by living for God's intended purpose as Image Bearers.

"⁴ Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved." (Ephesians 2:4-5)

The Gospel offers the good news that while you were dead in your sins Christ made you alive when you laid hold of Him by faith. I hope that there was a day here for everyone that you realized you were helpless to save yourself. The only thing you had to offer God was the hand of a drowning person. And with the little faith you had, you grabbed hold of Jesus trusting that Jesus had grabbed hold of you. Can you remember that day, the day you laid hold of Jesus, not with any great strength, maybe not with any great faith. But you believed because He had stretched wide His arms to reach down to you that you laid hold of Him. I hope you can.

The gospel offers even more Good news. Jesus came to redeem you- not simply from the wages of sin- which is death. He came to redeem you from an empty way of life which sin promises. He has come to save us from ourselves and our weak attempts to grab hold of things that promise life but can't deliver.

Notice how Peter frames salvation and redemption in 1 Peter 1

"¹⁸ You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." (1 Peter 1:18-19)

- This empty way of life still beckons us.
- The enemy still whispers, "God is withholding something good for you... so take hold of this instead." And so we do. We spend our lives grasping
 - Some grab money.
 - Some grab pleasure.
 - Some grab success.
 - Some grab politics.
 - Some grab comfort.
 - Some grab control.

Every one of them promises..."This is life." But they leave us dead inside.

And the temptation doesn't end when we trust in Jesus. Does it?

Paul has already warned us that even as believers we can still live like we are dead when we choose to live for pleasure. **"The widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. (1 Timothy 5:6)"**

Paul has warned us throughout this letter that it is possible to place our faith in lesser things and to let go of our grasp- this isn't a "I don't have the strength to hang on" letting go... this is a "God isn't enough so I will go grabbing for more." In fact Paul ends the letter by writing...

"Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith." (1 Tim 6:20-21)

Remember all the other encouragements and warnings related to grabbing hold of lesser things.

1 Tim 1:19 "Hold on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith."

1 Tim 4:1 "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons."

1 Tim 6:10 "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

Eventually all those leave us empty and dead inside. So Paul tells us to grab better things. We are to take hold of eternal life, of the life that really is life. The life we have all been looking for and grasping to get isn't found in getting more in our hands. It is found in opening up our hands and releasing our need for those things so that we can take hold of God.

- Question: How do I take hold of this life?
11 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.
- Note: you can read this as a list of 4 things- flee, pursue, fight, and take hold.
I don't think you would be wrong. But I want to take us back to the garden...
Adam and Eve had a choice to take hold of the fruit or to take hold of God.
They chose not to flee. Hey, first sign of a talking serpent I am running.
They chose not to pursue God.
They didn't fight the good fight of faith.

When have chosen to find life in lesser things it was because we chose the same.

We should have fled. We stayed. We redefined our boundaries. We crept closer.

We should have pursued godliness and righteousness and gentleness and love and we made excuses not to. It doesn't start with choosing bad habits. It starts with stopping the good habits of pursuing God.

We quit fighting the fight of faith. The sin of Adam and Eve all started with a seed of doubt. "Did God really say?"

We fight to hang onto faith.

- We fight to believe that Jesus will return and as King and make all things right.
"14 **I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,** 15 **which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords."** (1 Tim 6:14-15)
- We fight to believe that the path of Jesus is better even when it isn't easier.
- We fight to believe that God is good and can be trusted with those things that we need to satisfy us...
we find Paul telling Timothy "**command them to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.**" (1 Tim 6:17-18)
- Battle to believe that in Christ I have enough and I am enough.

So we flee the things that offer no life. We pursue the one who is our life but pursuing righteousness and love. And we fight to hold onto our faith. And then Paul would add...

(vs. 17-19) "17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be

generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

If the words in this section sound somewhat familiar, they should. Paul is simply affirming what Jesus had already said in **Matthew 6:19-20: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But do store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven... because moth and rust and thieves can't touch them"**

Paul isn't anti-wealth. Jesus isn't against investments. They both suggest that wealth is a tool that with wise investments we can increase our riches. Wealth is a tool to make sure we have a secure future. And we are not wrong in seeing it that way... we just are too short-sighted about the future. Paul encourages us to use our wealth to invest... but to invest in a much longer term. And the way we increase our long-term wealth is to be rich in good deeds. Part of that is by being generous and sharing.

Note: Laying hold of life isn't one dramatic moment but a daily posture. Every day I let go of one thing and grab hold of another. Every act of generosity is grabbing life. Every act of forgiveness is grabbing life. Every act of fleeing from a lesser thing and pursuing God is an act of grabbing life. Every act of trusting God instead of money is grabbing life.

Every small deed that is a good deed add up over time so that we can be rich in good deeds. When we choose those small deeds we lay up for ourselves treasures in the coming age- the coming age when Jesus makes all things new and takes us back to the Garden we long for.

Since Genesis we've been trying to get back.
Every promotion, every relationship, every accomplishment...
every possession, every addiction, every idol...
has been one more attempt to get back to the Garden without God.
The first Adam reached out and grasped the wrong thing, believing it would make him more alive.

Paul says, "Reach out again—but this time, grab the only thing that actually is Life."
Jesus didn't simply come to tell us where the Garden used to be.
He is the Way back
He promises to bring it back to us.
We have this promise in **Revelation 22.**

"¹Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.

**Note: the Tree of Life appears again.
The curse is gone
Creation is restored**

The story ends where it began. Only better.

And until that day you don't have to wait experience real life. You just have to quit grasping for other things and take hold of Jesus. Take hold of Him. You don't have to be strong. You don't have to have it all together.

What saves a drowning person isn't that they become a stronger swimmer. They live because they stop thrashing long enough to grab the hand reaching down to them.

We've spent our lives grabbing everything except the one thing that can save us. Money. Pleasure. Success. Control. Approval. We keep reaching sideways looking for a Savior from meaningless existence. Paul says, "Reach up. Reach out. You can trust that the One who saved you FROM sin has saved you FOR life."

You'll find His hand has already been stretched out to you.

It bears the scars that prove He loves you.

So you can "Carpe Diem" if you want and hope that you find life in your YOLOS.

Or you can "Carpe Deus" and seize God. Take that hand... today, tomorrow, everyday until hand in hand you walk with Him in the Garden.